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L E T T E R S

TO

A YOUNG MAN,

P A R T II.

OCCASIONED BY

MR. EVANSON'S TREATISE ON THE DISSONANCE OF
THE FOUR GENERALLY RECEIVED EVANGELISTS.

By JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

———— Vultus erat multa et præclara mirantis.
Dic aliquid dignum promissis. ————

R
HORACE.

—————
L O N D O N :

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—————
1793.



P R E F A C E.

Nothing was ever more unexpected by me than that I, or, indeed, that any other person, should, at this day, have occasion to enter into a discussion of the subject of these Letters; as nothing seemed to be better established than the authenticity of almost all the canonical books of the New Testament, no unbeliever having, of late years, hinted a suspicion to the contrary, and every reasonable doubt having been removed by such laborious and candid writers as Mr. Jones, and Dr. Lardner, not to mention several others, whose works could not be unknown to Mr. Evanfon. That such books were extant, in, or very near to, the time in which the events recorded, or alluded to, in them happened, so that it was impossible but that the truth might be known with respect to them, there is abundantly more evidence than there is of any other historical books whatever having been written, and published, in the same circumstances. Doubts, there-

fore, with respect to the authenticity of the books of the New Testament (I mean the universally received ones, as the four Gospels, and the greater part of the Epistles ascribed to Paul) might justly extend to all other writings whatever, and lead to universal scepticism.

By what particular train of thought Mr. Evanston was originally led to entertain the doubts which at length produced the work on which I here animadvert, does not appear. That it was, directly or indirectly, from any disbelief of Christianity, I have not the smallest suspicion. His noble conduct in resigning a valuable church preferment, rather than recite the offices, after he had rejected the doctrines, of the established church, is an abundant proof both of his firm belief of Christianity, and of the happy influence it had upon his mind; unbelievers in general making no scruple to adhere to any church, so long as they can receive the emoluments of it. The cast of Mr. Evanston's writings also proves, not only that he is a Christian, but that Christian literature is his favourite study, all his publications being of this kind, intended to enforce, and illustrate, some article of Christian faith or practice.

But having given more particular attention to the subject of *prophecy*, to which we are indebted

indebted for his excellent *Letter to the bishop of Worcester*, he appears to me to have overlooked, and undervalued, the evidence of Christianity from *testimony*; not seeming to have considered the nature of it, and how it has actually operated in all ages, and must do, while human nature is the same that it now is, and ever has been. Also, not being able to vindicate, so well as he could wish, some particular passages in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, and in some of the Epistles of Paul, which have been urged in support of doctrines and practices which he justly deems to be corruptions of genuine Christianity, he may have wished to find those books not to be genuine, as that would be the easiest way of getting rid of the difficulty; and without considering the external evidence of their authenticity, and not having the critical skill, or the patience, that was requisite to ascertain the true sense of those passages, he has hastily concluded them to be spurious productions. In a state of mind which I have supposed, nothing is easier than to find objections to any writings; and when a man has, though ever so hastily, and incautiously, advanced any thing in public, the best of us are so much

men, and have so much of human imperfection about us, as to wish to defend it.

In this manner I endeavour to account for the work, the principles of which I have, in these Letters, undertaken to refute. In his excellent Letter on the subject of prophecy, Mr. Evanfon first threw out an insinuation against the credit of the Gospel of Matthew, which offended many of his friends, and the friends of Christianity. But he has given us all particular satisfaction in producing the reasons on which that insinuation was founded, as we can now examine them, and judge for ourselves; whereas many persons, having a high opinion of the judgment and integrity of Mr. Evanfon, were inclined to suppose his reasons to be more weighty than they will find them to be.

The only circumstance that offends me in this work of Mr. Evanfon's is the levity and contempt with which he treats those books of the New Testament which he thinks he has seen reason to reject. He had no occasion in this manner to hurt the feelings of many of his readers. What they have been long accustomed to read with reverence, they must be shocked to see made the subject of ridicule
and

and unsparing farcasm, and especially by a professed Christian. From unbelievers we expect nothing better, and therefore we are prepared for every thing contemptuous that they can throw out. Having nothing in their habitual feelings and state of mind congenial to the sentiments of Christians (who believe that they derive every pleasing prospect for time and eternity from the Scriptures) it cannot be supposed that they should respect those feelings of which they have no idea, and which they cannot conceive even to exist. They, therefore, have an excuse which Mr. Evanfon has not.

Mr. Evanfon must, in his early years, have been taught to peruse the whole of the New Testament with nearly equal respect; and in reading the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, must have felt just as he did in reading that of Luke. And as he grew up, and reflected upon what he read, and attended to the impressions which those writings made upon him, he must have perceived the same unequivocal marks of genuine piety, and a disinterested regard to truth, in *all* the evangelists. How he should ever come to lose those impressions, and feel differently in read-

ing any of them, I cannot tell. But whenever he came to suspect, or to think, that they were not genuine (which he must have done with great reluctance) he should have contented himself with simply giving his reasons for the opinion he had adopted, and have dismissed those books as old friends, to whom he had formerly conceived himself to be under some obligation, and not have turned them out of doors with so much rudeness and insult.

Mr. Evanſon may impute it to weakneſs and prejudice, but I own I have not been able to read his work, and copy ſo much of it as I have thought proper to do, without very unpleaſing feelings. Notwithſtanding this, I hope it will not be perceived that it has at all influenced me in my replies to him, or that I have given way to aſperity, where nothing but calm diſcuſſion was wanted. I could not treat Mr. Evanſon as he has done the authors of the Goſpels of Matthew, Mark, and John; and I am perſuaded they will approve of my conduct, and not think the worſe of their advocate for defending them without anger. On this, as on every other occaſion, I could wiſh to imbibe their excellent ſpirit,

and in every controverſy, in which human prejudices and paſſions are too apt to mix themſelves, not to forget that I am a Chriſtian.

I do not ſay this with a view to beſpeak any peculiar mildneſs in Mr. Evanſon's reply to me. Let every man write as he is naturally diſpoſed; and if he ſhould treat me with the ſame aſperity with which he has treated the authors of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, I ſhall not complain; having no reaſon to expect better uſage than they have met with. I ſhall rather rejoice to ſare as they do; and having been long uſed to pretty harſh treatment, I can very well bear it.

I write in the form of *Letters to a Young Man*, as young perſons are in the greateſt danger of being caught with any ſuperficial reaſoning that tends, in the ſmalleſt degree, to remove reſtraints on the indulgence of their paſſions; and ſuch perſons will be too apt to conclude that, if the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, and ſo many of the epiſtles of Paul, be ſpurious, that of Luke, and all the other books of the New Teſtament, may be ſo too. And if, with Mr.
Evanſon,

Evanſon, they ſhould confound the authenticity of thoſe books with the credibility of the facts recorded in them, they will ſoon find themſelves at liberty from any reſtraint that the belief of Chriſtianity has hitherto impoſed upon them.

With a view to ſuch perſons, I have, in theſe Letters, as on other occaſions, endeavoured to point out the real foundation of our faith in the Goſpel hiſtory, and to ſhew that it is independent of the authenticity of any books. It has not been by the fair examination of hiſtorical evidence, but in moſt caſes by ſome ſhort metaphyſical reaſoning, that men have become unbelievers, and in general it has been their having conceived what they had been taught to conſider as Chriſtianity to be unworthy of their ideas of God, or their diſcovering ſome ſeeming impropriety in the books which they had been taught to regard as inſpired, that has, without any farther reaſoning, induced them to reject Chriſtianity. It cannot, therefore, be too ſtrongly held out to them, that the truth of Chriſtianity is independent of every thing of this kind; that, let them think what they will of the doctrines of the Goſpel, or of the books
that

that contain them, a man must have a divine mission who, in proof of it, does what God alone could empower him to do; and that Christ and the apostles unquestionably did such things, *i. e.* work real miracles, if the evangelical history be only in the main true. For without this it was naturally impossible that Christianity should have been received, as all history, sacred and profane, shews that it was, in the early ages.

When the mind is possessed of this fixed principle, it will not be so apt to revolt at seeming improbabilities in the books of scripture. Finding it impossible to resist the evidence of miracles, and of testimony, in favour of Christianity, a man will naturally consider the difficulties in every point of view; and if he be not unfortunately situated indeed with respect to information, he will soon satisfy himself that they are far from being insuperable; or, at least, that when every deduction from the strength of the evidence is made on this account, there will remain a great preponderance of evidence in its favour, such as will induce every reasonable man to act upon it; especially when he considers that the end of
all

all faith in the gospel is the observance of the moral precepts of it, and that the moral precepts of Christianity are the same with those of natural religion, the observance of which is highly conducive to health of body and peace of mind in this life, without any regard to another; virtue hardly ever failing to be its own reward.

I mention these considerations in this place because, though I have no doubt of Mr. Evanſon's friendly intention with respect to Christianity, many of his readers and admirers avail themselves of the principles of his work, as, in their opinion, highly unfavourable to it; and they are too ready to catch at every thing that, by any perversion, they can bend to their purpose.

In some respects this is unavoidable by all who, from the best intentions, and the purest regard to Christianity, endeavour to free it from any of the corruptions or abuses with which it has been loaded; since this necessarily occasions divisions among Christians, and has also too often an unpleasant effect on the tempers and conduct of the contending parties; and to superficial spectators these things
furnish

furnish a specious objection to the religion about which they contend.

On this account I have taken this opportunity of shewing that no difference of opinion among Christians about the authenticity of the books of Scripture, or the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, will justify unbelievers in their rejection of it. It behoves them, as persons deeply interested in the discussion, to see every thing with their own eyes, and to judge for themselves, whatever labour may be necessary for that purpose. If it was an estate to which they thought they had, or might have, a title, they would not dismiss all attention to the subject because the lawyers they consulted could not agree about some points of law respecting it. Or if they were at sea in a storm, they would not think themselves unconcerned, because the sailors had different opinions about the best method of saving the ship.

Could unbelievers see things in their true light, without any improper bias upon their minds, from unworthy passions, and pursuits, they would see that they had the greatest personal interest in the truth or falsehood of Christianity, and would make the most diligent

gent inquiry into the evidence of it, without at all regarding what any other persons thought concerning it. And if, from any motive, they be truly diligent and impartial in their inquiries, such are the means of information that are now within their reach, that I have little doubt of their becoming Christians, and zealously attached to their religion; and consequently, by cultivating the temper, and habitually discharging the duties of it, acquiring a superior dignity and excellence of character themselves, and thereby recommending it to the regard of others.

It will be observed that my quotations from Mr. Evanfon are unusually long. I purposely made them so, that he might not have any just reason to complain of me for diminishing their strength. Still, however, I have left some articles untouched, but they are such as appeared to me to be least worthy of particular notice. After remarking upon almost every thing in his objections to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, and the Epistle to the Romans, I thought it unnecessary even to mention his objections to some of the other epistles. I also thought my readers would be tired of perusing things so very offensive to them,

them, and at the same time so weak. But if Mr. Evanſon, in his reply, ſhould require it, I promiſe him to be as full in my remarks with reſpect to theſe, as I have been with reſpect to the former books.

Some who entertain my ſentiments of Mr. Evanſon's performance will wonder that a man of his abilities and learning, ſhould write ſo weakly; and ſome, not being themſelves judges of the controverſy, will be apt to think there muſt be great uncertainty in the ſubject itſelf, when learned men can think ſo differently about it. But no perſon acquainted with the writings of Mr. Whiſton, will think *him* to have been leſs able, or leſs learned, than Mr. Evanſon; and yet his ſtrange weakneſs of judgment with reſpect to ſubjects of Chriſtian antiquity (to which, notwithstanding, he did not fail to give much attention) has not led any ſcholar to think that there is any particular uncertainty, or obſcurity, in the ſubjects about which he has puzzled himſelf and ſome others ſo much. Single perſons often entertain ſingular notions about politics, and things in common life; but it is a circumſtance that has no effect on the deciſiveness of the judgment of other perſons when they have

have themselves given proper attention to the subjects. At present Mr. Evanfon's performance does not stagger the learned, and after some time I am confident it will have no more effect than Mr. Whiston's new canon of the New Testament. His curious reasoning now only serves to amuse us, shewing the weakness of the human mind in certain respects, at the same time that we admire its strength in others.

In my references to the Christian Fathers I have generally contented myself with quoting Dr. Lardner and Michaelis. My collection of the Fathers, which had occupied me more than twenty years, was demolished in the riot at Birmingham, and it is too late in life for me to restore it. In the present case I am satisfied that my readers will have no more distrust than I have of the care, or fidelity, with which the writers above mentioned have made their quotations.

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1831

The Honorable Secretary of the Navy
Washington

LETTER VII

A copy of the report of the
Honorable Secretary of the Navy
Washington

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Report of the Honorable Secretary of the Navy
Washington
1831

LETTERS
TO A
YOUNG MAN.

PART II.

LETTER I.

*Of the Nature of Historical Evidence, illustrated by
that of the Propagation of Christianity.*

DEAR SIR,

I AM happy to find that, in my former *Letters*, I was able to give you satisfaction with respect to the propriety of *Public Worship*, and of the observance of the *Lord's Day* for that purpose, in reply to the objections of Mr. Wakefield and Mr. Evanston. You have since read, as every scholar will do, Mr. Evanston's treatise on the *Dissonance of the Four generally received Evangelists*; and, as I perceive, you are, with many others, considerably impressed by it.

You are inclined to think that the Christian church has received the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, as well as several of the epistles, without sufficient authority, and that the only authentic history of the origin and first planting of Christianity is to be found in the gospel of Luke, and the Acts of the Apostles. You are also disposed to lay but little stress upon any evidence arising from *testimony*,

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with respect to events so remote and extraordinary, and to rely on that of *completed prophecy* in preference to it. You wish, however, to have my free thoughts on these subjects, and I shall have much pleasure in giving you them. The investigation of truth is always a pleasing employment, and it is more particularly interesting when the subject is *religion*.

You will naturally enough suspect, though you will not tell me so, that it is owing to *prejudice*, that I am unwilling to accede to opinions so novel and startling as those advanced by Mr. Evanston; and it would be vain for me to deny that I am as subject to prejudice as other men; though, in general, I have not objected to any opinions on account of their *novelty*, or their not having been generally received, whether advanced by other persons, or suggested by myself. You will attend, however, to the arguments that I shall produce, and compare them with those of Mr. Evanston; and let us both endeavour to keep our minds as free from prejudice as we can, that we may neither be misled ourselves, nor contribute to mislead others.

In the first place, I shall consider what Mr. Evanston has advanced with respect to *historical evidence* in general, as applied by him to the evidence of Christianity. "To all future ages," he says, p. 5, "prophecy, the completed prediction of events out of the power of human sagacity to foresee, is the only supernatural testimony that can be alleged in proof of the authenticity of any revelation. To those,"
 "for

“for example, of the present age, who have any
“doubt about the certainty of the Christian revela-
“tion, and consequently of the truth and authenticity
“of those histories in which it is recorded, it cannot
“be of the least use to allege the miraculous acts
“there, and there only, related to have been per-
“formed by the first preachers of that revelation;
“because those acts making a very considerable part
“of the narration, the authority and credibility of
“the histories must be firmly established before the
“miracles contained in them can reasonably be ad-
“mitted as real facts.” P. 6. “Prophecy, there-
“fore,” he adds, “is by far the most satisfactory,
“and the only lasting, supernatural evidence of the
“truth of any revelation.” And (p. 19), “the su-
“pernatural power of working miracles could only
“be intended to gain the new religion attention from
“the world, and to be a present testimony of its di-
“vine origin and authority, till the more lasting and
“more satisfactory proof of completed prophecy
“could take place.”

I would be far from undervaluing the evidence of
completed prophecy in favour of revelation. I va-
lue Christianity too much to neglect any proper ar-
gument in favour of it. Since God only can see into
remote futurity, the causes of distant events being
concealed from all human penetration, if we have
sufficient evidence of any event being distinctly fore-
told, and we are satisfied that the prediction was no
random conjecture, we necessarily conclude that it

was dictated by God, and that any declaration connected with it may be depended upon, since the Supreme Being could not intend to impose upon his creatures. I also believe that in the scriptures there are several such predictions, the publication of which may be clearly proved to have been prior to the events.

But notwithstanding this, the proper, and universally satisfactory evidence of all *past events*, miraculous as well as others, is the testimony of persons who were eye-witnesses of them. It depends upon a principle which no person will deny, viz. that human nature has been the same in all ages, and therefore that, if the testimony of persons now living, who could not be deceived themselves, and who had no motive to impose upon others, may be depended upon, that of persons in the same circumstances a hundred or a thousand years ago may be depended upon. They are but few things that we can see with our own eyes; but we are well satisfied with the evidence of their having been seen by others.

The evidence of the truth of Christianity is of this satisfactory kind; and if the facts on which it depends be of an extraordinary kind, as not being analogous to any thing that we ourselves are witnesses to; the testimony by which they are ascertained is in full proportion copious and definite; persons then living having had every motive that men could have to examine and re-examine every thing relating to them, both its friends and its enemies having been sufficiently

sufficiently interested so to do, and while the facts were recent, and capable of being easily investigated.

In the preceding extract Mr. Evanfon says that the evidence of miracles is not to be depended upon, "because they make a considerable part of the narration, the truth of which is questioned." But if the narrative be sufficiently authenticated, the truth of the miracles is as well established as that of any other facts; and there can be no objection to *them*, but what affects the *narrative*, i. e. the books which contain the account of them. To make this objection of any weight, Mr. Evanfon must maintain, with Mr. Hume, that no account of miracles can be credible. If they be credible at all, their credibility may be ascertained by sufficient testimony.

If, as he says, miracles could only be designed to *excite attention* till another kind of proof, viz. that of completed prophecy, can be applied, they could not themselves be a proof of any thing. But a completed prophecy is only a particular species of miracle; so that if *miracles* be no proof of a revelation, *this* also could answer no end, but to excite more attention. Miracles, however, did, in fact, not only excite attention, but actually enforced the belief of the divine missions of Moses and of Christ long before any prophecies were known to be completed; and it was the satisfaction which the evidence of these miracles gave to those who saw them, that engaged the belief of those who did not see them.

In what other manner, and on what other principle, were so many converts made during the life of Christ, and till the destruction of Jerusalem, during all which time the prophecies in the Christian church were very inconsiderable? Were the Christians of those days, many of whom endured great hardships, and some of whom laid down their lives, for their profession of Christianity (and many of them did not themselves see any miracle, but only heard the reports of others) only in a state of attention and expectation, without any real belief in the divine mission of Christ, till they could see some prophecy completed? Nay, would the completion of any prophecy have produced a greater effect than did the certain belief, whether occasioned by the evidence of their own senses, or that of others, that Jesus wrought real miracles, and that he died, and rose from the dead? What other evidence of the divine mission of Christ, or of the truth of Christianity, was wanting to persons who really believed these facts?

Mr. Evanston may think that miracles were sufficient to convince those who themselves saw them; but that completed prophecy is necessary to the conviction of those who had no opportunity of seeing them. But if the evidence of *sight* was sufficient to convince the spectators that the miracles were real, a sufficient evidence that those spectators were convinced, that is, the evidence of *testimony*, can be all that is necessary to convince others. For this places
them

them precisely in the situation of those who were the spectators. And if any person be so constituted, as to think that other men, of whose judgment and veracity he can have no doubt, were, from their own inspection and examination, satisfied with respect to the truth of any facts, without believing that they really took place, neither would he be convinced by the evidence of his own senses. Nothing can lead any man to suspend his assent in this case, but the persuasion that, though all other persons might be imposed upon, *he* could not; which is what no man will presume to say of himself. The proof, therefore, that competent witnesses were satisfied of the reality of any fact, miraculous or otherwise, must be sufficient to convince others. And this it has never failed to do.

Mr. Evanson seems to suppose that our belief of the miracles of Christ and the Apostles depends upon the authenticity of the books of the New Testament which contain the account of them; and certainly all our *knowledge* of these facts is derived from those books. But still our *faith* doth not rest upon the testimony of the writers of those books, but upon that of those who first received the books, and who transmitted them to us as authentic, which they would not have done, if they had not known them to be deserving of credit.

It is not because four persons, though the most unexceptionable evidences, assert that Christ and his Apostles wrought miracles, that we believe the

facts. We believe them on the evidence of the thousand, and tens of thousands, themselves well acquainted with the facts, by whom it cannot be denied that the contents of these books were credited. It is on the testimony of all the primitive Christians, and in some measure of the heathen world also, that we believe in the miracles, the death, and resurrection of Christ, in consequence of which we are Christians.

The books called *the Gospels* were not the *cause*, but the *effect*, of the belief of Christianity in the first ages. For Christianity had been propagated with great success long before those books were written; nor had the publication of them any particular effect in adding to the number of Christian converts. Christians received the books because they knew beforehand that the contents of them were true; and they were at that time of no further use than to ascertain, and fix, the testimony of living witnesses, in order to its being transmitted without variation to succeeding ages. For what could have been *the preaching of the gospel* originally, but a recital of the discourses and miracles of Christ, by those who were eye-witnesses of them, to those who were not? The gospels, therefore, contain the substance of all their preaching.

While the eye-witnesses were living, there was little occasion for books; and accordingly no histories were written till about thirty years after the ascension of Christ, when the eye-witnesses were going
off

off the stage, and consequently when their testimony, without being secured by writing, could not have been known with certainty, or have been transmitted to future ages. This was the natural and the actual progress of things in the primitive times.

Since the belief of Christianity did not originally depend upon the authenticity of any books, the disproving their authenticity will not affect its credibility. The miracles of Christ and the Apostles must have been true, or the belief of Christianity could not have been established in the circumstances in which it may be proved from history that it did actually gain ground. And unbelievers in Christianity prove nothing against it, unless they can prove that Christianity did not make the progress that it is said to have done while the facts were *recent*, or that the circumstances in which it was propagated were materially different from what is commonly apprehended; as that the civil powers did not oppose its propagation, so that there was no persecution of Christians, nothing to lead its friends or its enemies to *inquire* into the evidence of the facts while they were recent. But the history of those times is so well known, that this is clearly out of any man's power, and must be so to the end of time, while any history of the first and second centuries shall exist.

The present state of things with respect to the belief of Christianity cannot be accounted for without supposing the state of it in the last century to have been such as all authentic history represents
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it. In like manner, going back through every century, we shall find that every one of them requires the preceding to have been what history informs us that it was, till we find that it could not possibly have had the spread that it evidently had in the times of Pliny and of Nero, unless such a narrative as that of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles had been true, whether those particular books be authentic or not.

We have no reason, therefore, from a regard to Christianity, to be alarmed at any effect that Mr. Evanston's publication can have. Whatever we may think with respect to the authenticity of any particular books, all history is a standing and sufficient evidence of the truth of Christianity, and affords a firm foundation of our faith. I shall, therefore, proceed with perfect calmness to examine what Mr. Evanston has advanced against the authenticity of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, and in favour of the preference that he is disposed to give to that of Luke, not as a believer in Christianity against an unbeliever, but as one critic, if I may so call myself, against another; and I wish you to attend to my reasoning with the same dispassionate calmness with which I write.

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER II.

Of the Authenticity of the Four Gospels in general.

DEAR SIR,

MR. EVANSON, without seeming to consider that the authenticity of his favourite Gospel of Luke, rests on the very same foundation with that of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, more than insinuates, that their authority is very doubtful. "The whole weight," he says, page 13, "of the historical evidence in favour of the authenticity of the four gospels amounts to no more than this, that those books, in the main of their contents, were extant in the latter end of the second century, and were received by all the Christian writers, whose works have been suffered to come down to us, as the writings of the several apostles and apostolic men whose names they bear. But besides the suspicious circumstance already mentioned, arising from the prophecies of the gospel, this evidence is defective in such essential points as render it wholly unsatisfactory, and insufficient to prove any matter of consequence, even in the ordinary courts of justice: for neither the competency nor veracity of the witnesses can be depended on."

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If this be the case, no regard is due to any of the Gospels, or to any of the books of the New Testament. But the circumstances of the Christian church, which received these books, and transmitted them to us, were such, as there cannot be a doubt with respect to the *competency* of their evidence, because they were published in the life-time of thousands, and myriads, who were as competent witnesses of the facts as the writers themselves; and there cannot be any question of their *veracity*, unless we suppose that they all combined to tell, and to propagate, a falsehood, to their own prejudice, and merely to impose upon all posterity; which would be a greater miracle, as being more contrary to what we know of human nature, than any thing recorded in those books.

Mr. Evanston evidently argues upon the idea, that the writers who first mention the Gospels are the only witnesses of their authenticity; and he thinks they were too remote, and too prejudiced, to be depended upon. But besides that no *motive* can be imagined for such conduct, let them be supposed to have been ever so liable to prejudice, it was not in their power to impose upon the world with respect to these books. For though there were few writers between the time in which the Gospels were written and Justin Martyr; and admitting, what there is no occasion to do, that all the intervening writers are spurious, it was only an interval of about seventy years, and in this there was no interruption of christian churches. In all this time the scriptures of the
New

New Testament, as well as those of the Old, were constantly and publicly read; so that the books which had been received as authentic, by those who were themselves judges of their authenticity, could not be unknown; and there never was any doubt with respect to any of the Four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the far greater part of the Epistles.

We find in Eusebius, that Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, who was acquainted with the daughters of that Philip who baptized the eunuch of the queen of Ethiopia, and who wrote A. D. 116, only about fifty years after the writing of the Gospels, mentions the Gospel of Matthew, and in such a manner, as that it appears there was not then any dispute about it; so that there cannot be any reason to doubt, that the Gospel which ~~we now have that~~ bears his name, was the same that we now have, and as it was originally published.

As there had not, at that time, been any general persecution of Christians, it is probable that the originals of the books, which they held in the highest esteem, and especially the epistles of Paul to particular churches, were preserved till so many copies had been taken, and so many translations made of them, as would put it out of the power of fraud to impose upon the world with respect to them. The interest that all Christians certainly took in those books would ensure this. As these books were, no doubt, then, as they are now, publicly read in all Christian churches, the authenticity of any other books is not to be compared with that of these.

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The superior evidence of the authenticity of the books of the New Testament, may be illustrated by that of books known to have been used in schools from the time of their first composition, and that of books which only fall into the hands of men of leisure. Of the former, every school, and many of the scholars, would, of course, have copies; so that the difficulty of making any material alteration in them would soon become insuperable: whereas the other would only be copied now and then, according to the casual demand for them. The books of the New Testament had a similar advantage, by being read in all Christian churches, as well as in private families, with the additional one, of the infinitely greater interest that Christians conceived themselves to have in their contents.

The antient versions of the ~~books of the~~ New Testament afford a decisive proof of their antiquity. For though none that are now extant can be proved to have existed so early as Mr. Evanfon requires, there is evidence that there were translations of them, probably the ground-work of those that we now have, in an earlier period. There were Syriac versions, and several Latin ones, in the very first century. See Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament, vol. i. p. 44. And this is highly probable in itself. For if there were converts to Christianity in Syria, which was contiguous to Judea, and among the Romans, as no doubt there were, they would get copies of all the writings that were held in esteem by Christians, as soon as they heard of them.

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Mr. Evanfon seems not to have been aware of the difficulty of forging books, especially such as those of the New Testament, on account of the peculiarity of their *style*, which is so unlike that of any other writings whatever, more especially for the *Hebraisms* that occur in them. On this account the writers must have been Jews; whereas Mr. Evanfon supposes them to have been written in so late a period, that it is almost certain there were few, if any, Jewish writers. And no Jewish Christian, if we know any thing of their sentiments, would have concurred in such an imposition; because they opposed those corrupt doctrines and practices, which Mr. Evanfon supposes they were written to promote. He will hardly suppose that any Jewish Christian would have forged the epistles ascribed to Paul.

As to writers properly *Greek* forging these books, it would have been absolutely impossible. Besides the many insuperable difficulties arising from an attention to geography, chronology, and history, the mode of writing is wholly unlike that of any Greek. The earliest Greek christians, who favoured the opinions that Mr. Evanfon will deem corrupt, were Justin Martyr, and his disciple Tatian. But how unlike is their style to that of the New Testament, and how incapable (though the former of them lived in Palestine) must they have been of forging such books as these? Besides they were both too honest to think of any such thing.

There were, no doubt, in pretty early times, other
Gospels

Gospels written in imitation of the genuine ones, though not perhaps with a view to impose upon the world, with respect to any thing of importance, for that was manifestly impossible. But learned Christians were, from the beginning, so attentive to this business, that the attempts could never succeed.

Serapion, bishop of Antioch, A. D. 200, in an epistle to some who had too much respect for a work, entitled *The Gospel of Peter*, said, "We, brethren, receive Peter, and the other apostles, as Christians; but, as skilful men, we reject those writings which are falsely ascribed to them, well knowing that we have received no such." Lardner's works, vol. vi. p. 29. Austin says, "We know the writings of the apostles, as we know the works of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Varro, and others, and as we know the writings of several ecclesiastical authors; forasmuch as they have the testimony of cotemporaries, and of those who lived in succeeding times." Ib. p. 31.

Accordingly, learned men (and Christian churches were never without such men) as Serapion, Origen, Eusebius, Jerom, and Austin, had it in their power to ascertain the genuineness of all the books used by Christians; and it appears from their writings, that it was done to general, if not universal satisfaction, before there was any interruption of learning, civilization, or Christianity, in that part of the world in which the gospel originated. Dr. Lardner observes, that "from the quotations of Irenæus, Clemens Alexan-

“drinus, Tertullian, and other writers of the second
“century, of Origen in the third, and of Eusebius in
“the fourth century, it appears, that the greatest
“part of the books which are now received by us,
“and are called *canonical*, were universally acknow-
“ledged in their times, and had been so acknow-
“ledged by the elders and churches of former times.
“And the rest now received by us, though they
“were then doubted of, or contradicted, were well
“known, and approved by many.” vol. vi. p. 26.

The books, concerning which doubts were entertained in the time of Eusebius (it not being agreed by all, that they were written by the persons to whom they are ascribed) were only the epistle to the Hebrews, that of James, the second of Peter, the second and third of John, and the Revelation, which Mr. Evanfon, depending upon the evidence of completed prophecy, rather than that of historical testimony, considers as one of the most authentic of all the books of the New Testament.

That doubts were entertained concerning the books above mentioned, is the less to be wondered at, as they were not epistles addressed to particular churches, where provision would naturally be made for preserving them, but either treatises, or epistles addressed to whole descriptions of men, or to private persons, in whose hands they would be more liable to accidents.

Mr. Evanfon considers the pretended power of working miracles, as an incontestable proof of the

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“*falsehood*”

"*falsehood* and deceit of the orthodox Christians of "early times," p. 18; whereas it proves nothing but their *credulity*, and that in one particular respect; and the number of real miracles in the age immediately preceding their own would, without any great imputation upon them, dispose them to believe in others on slight grounds. Besides, this credulity, and especially the charge of falsehood and imposition in this case, is greatly exaggerated by Mr. Evanston.

The strongest cases that Mr. Evanston mentions are the following. "A third," he says, p. 15, meaning Tertullian, "asserts upon his own knowledge, that "the corpse of one dead Christian, *at the first breath* "of the prayer made by the Priest, on occasion of its "own funeral, *removed its hands from its sides, into the* "usual posture of a suppliant, and when the service "was ended, *restored them again to their former situa-* "tion; and relates as a fact, which he and all the "orthodox of his time credited, that the body of "another Christian already interred *moved itself to one* "side of the grave to make room for another corpse, "which was going to be laid by it."

Now this is by no means a just representation of the case; as Tertullian does not say that he knew *the fact*, but only *the woman*, of whom it was related, *Scio feminam*, &c. And that both the stories were only such as he had heard, and not what he knew of himself, is evident from his introducing the latter of them by saying, *Est et alia relatio apud nostros*, i. e. *There is another report current among us.* A man must

must have very little knowledge of human nature, or human life, who can infer from such credulity as this, that a person would knowingly impose upon the world by fictitious books. I do not believe Tertullian to have been any more capable of this than Mr. Evanfon himself.

How easily, and I believe innocently, such stories as these in Tertullian may gain ground, and be propagated, I had a remarkable instance of, when I lived at Leeds, where the Dissenters to whom I was minister bury their own dead. A young woman was brought to be interred on a Saturday evening; and having performed part of the service in the meeting-house, I was waiting in the vestry till the corpse was carried to the grave: when, finding that the people were longer about this business than usual, I asked the clerk what occasioned the delay. He said, they were disputing whether the woman was really dead. Upon this I went to them, and asked whether any of them had a doubt about her being dead; and the mother, who was present, saying that *she* had, I advised them to take her home, and endeavour to bring her to life, it being time enough to bury her when it should appear that she was certainly dead; and accordingly they took her back again.

This incident, as might be expected, gave occasion to much conversation, and many reports; and the next day I heard that one person, talking of it to another, said, “she was alive sure enough, for that

“ she was as red as a fox, and sweat like a brock,” common proverbs in that part of the country. On hearing this I said, I should not wonder if it was reported in some of the neighbouring towns, that the woman was actually come to life. But more than this took place in Leeds itself, for presently after this it was said, that she came to life in the meeting-house; that, lifting up her head, she moved the lid of the coffin, and that being taken out, and resting a little in the vestry, she walked home by the help of the clerk. Now I can easily conceive that this story grew to this size, and in so short a time, in consequence of being frequently repeated, without the least intention to deceive in any of the relaters. The woman, however, was really dead, and we buried her on the Monday following.

Had any person living in Leeds, and only acquainted with this woman, believed the report, and related it in such Latin as Tertullian wrote, he would have introduced it with saying, as he does, *Scio feminam*, &c.

Mr. Evanfon says, p. 16, “ There is still a “ greater defect in the testimony of those early writers, than even their superstitious credulity. I “ mean their disregard of honour and veracity, in “ whatever concerned the cause of their particular “ system.” But even admitting this, which I am far from believing to be the case, it was absolutely out of the power of any Christians, divided as they were among

among themselves, from the very first, to impose forged books upon others. They would watch one another too narrowly for this. That all the Christian world, credulous as many of them may be supposed to have been, should agree to receive books as genuine, which they knew not to be so, is not to be admitted on such a pretence as this.

This blame is thrown by Mr. Evanston on those whom he terms the *orthodox* in the Christian church, p. 112, by whom he means the *Platonizing Christians*, for with them the doctrine of the *trinity*, at which he justly takes so much offence, originated. But the very first of these was Justin Martyr, as has been fully proved by Mr. Lindsey, and the canon of the New Testament with respect to the Four Gospels, and all the most important books, was fixed long before his time. In early times the Christian world, as Mr. Evanston will acknowledge, was, and must have been, Unitarian, with the exception of some Gnostics, and these entertained so great an aversion to each other, at least the former to the latter, that it could not have been in the power of either of them to impose upon the others, with respect to the authenticity of books equally received by them all. Besides, had the books been forged for any particular purpose, they would have been made more favourable to that purpose than they appear to be.

Notwithstanding this well known state of things, Mr. Evanston says, p. 112, "From what St. Luke

“ and other writers inform us, there is no doubt but
 “ the orthodox church, if she had chosen to pre-
 “ serve them, might, at this hour, have had forty
 “ instead of four different Gospels; and many of
 “ them much more deserving her regard than three
 “ of those she hath thought fit to select and save from
 “ the general wreck, in which the writings of the
 “ primitive Christians have been involved.”

This is advanced by Mr. Evanston from mere imagination, without even the appearance of any authority, so that it requires no refutation at all. Let Mr. Evanston enumerate these forty gospels, and show that any of them was deserving of so much credit as any of the four that are now received. Origen must have been a better judge in this respect than Mr. Evanston, and, according to Eusebius, he says, that “ he knew four Gospels only, and that he
 “ learned by tradition, that they only were received
 “ without dispute by the whole church of God un-
 “ der heaven.” Lardner’s Works, vol. vi. p. 28. Accordingly, in whatever estimation the few spurious gospels that we read of were held by some for a time, they sunk into universal discredit, and are lost, while *the four* are retained to this day, and will, I doubt not, continue to be respected as they now are, notwithstanding any attempt to discredit them. In fact, it is evident from the writings of Mr. Jones and Dr. Lardner, to which Mr. Evanston ought to have paid some attention, that there never were more than two or three of those spurious gospels,
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and that the credit they had was only with a few, and that of short duration.

It is not probable that any spurious gospels would be written, whatever were the views of the writers, till some genuine ones had got established credit. As to those that Luke refers to, he does not censure them as *spurious*, but only as *imperfect*; and there can be no doubt but that, of transactions of such importance, there would, from the earliest times, be many accounts, more or less accurate, in circulation among Christians.

Mr. Evanston may say, that the learned orthodox Christians were more assiduous in imposing upon the world with respect to the fabrication of books favourable to their purpose, than the Unitarians were in guarding against their impositions. But the Christian world was never without learned Unitarians, from the earliest times to those of Photinus; and in the age in which Mr. Evanston says that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John were written, the majority of Christian bishops were, no doubt, Unitarian; so that any attempt to impose upon them books unfavourable to their sentiments would have been in vain.

Mr. Evanston cannot say that the Unitarians might have made remonstrances on the subject, but that, their writings being lost, we have no means of knowing what they were. For though *writings* may be lost, yet, if they occasion any discussion, *arguments*,

ments, or at least traces of the *opinions* supported by them, will not be lost. Thus we can easily collect the arguments of the Gnostics, the Unitarians, and the Arians, of antient times, from the writings of their antagonists, though all their own are perished. If, therefore, the Unitarians, or any other denomination of Christians, had ever complained that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, or John, were spurious, we could not but have heard that they did so, and should also have known, though indirectly, the objections they made to them. Let Mr. Evan-son account, if he can, for the absolute, and almost instant rejection of the Gospel of Peter, and the universal reception of those of Matthew, Mark, and John, without supposing the latter to be genuine, and the other not.

Mr. Evan-son seems to think there is no evidence for the authenticity of the books that he rejects from the canon of the New Testament besides that of the *orthodox Christians*, by whom he means those who corrupted the gospel, and who wished to transmit their peculiar opinions and practices to posterity. But besides overlooking the consideration that, since the gospel was first preached by the Apostles, they who corrupted it must, of course, at first, have been few, and therefore that the great majority, who held it as it had been delivered to them, would have effectually prevented any such imposition; and also the farther consideration, that they who can be sup-
posed

posed to have forged books for the purpose above-mentioned were by no means agreed among themselves, and therefore would never have favoured one another's impositions; I say, besides overlooking these obvious considerations, he seems to have forgotten, that we have, in an indirect way, but by no means liable to any just suspicion, the testimony of those who were called *heretics*, and also that of the *Heathens*, to the authenticity of these books. It is true that their own writings are perished, but by means of their adversaries, we know what they did write, and what they thought, on every important subject. And there is reason to conclude that they admitted the authenticity of all the four Gospels, as well as that of some, and probably that of all, the epistles of Paul that are objected to by Mr. Evanfon.

The Cerinthians, who were probably some of the earliest Gnostics, cotemporary with John, and the other Apostles, must have known, according to Epiphanius, the Gospel of Matthew, because he says they adopted part of it. Michaelis' *Introd.* vol. i. p. 36. And I would observe that the rejection of the whole, or part, of a book, by the Gnostics, did not imply that they thought it spurious, but only that they did not approve of it, and especially that they did not choose to make use of it in their churches. Marcion, who lived in the beginning of the second century, mentioned the Gospel of Matthew, as well as that of Luke, the Epistle to the Hebrews, with those of Peter and James, and ten epistles of Paul:

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for he criticized them, and published new editions of them for the use of his disciples. *Ib.* p. 38.

The Ebionites I am far from considering as heretics, since, in my opinion, they were the genuine Jewish Christians; but they formed a body of Christians distinct from the Gentiles, who considered them as, on that account, heretics. Though they did not make use of any Gospel besides that of Matthew, with some variations, it is never said that they rejected the others; and it is certain that they knew of the epistles of Paul, since they objected to the doctrine of them, and disliked him much on that account.

Had there been any apparent cause of doubting the authenticity of the four Gospels, it could not have been unknown to the learned heathens who wrote against Christianity; and they would, no doubt, have availed themselves of it, as affording a suspicion that the things recorded in them never happened. But it is evident that Celsus, who wrote in the beginning of the second century, Porphyry, the most learned of all the opposers of Christianity, and Julian, the most inveterate of them, considered the books of the New Testament in general as no forgeries. Also, so early as the time of Celsus, there appear to have been many variations in different copies of them, which implies that they had been often copied, and therefore had existed a considerable time.

Mr. Evanfon says, p. 2, " This is far from being

“ing in any degree a proof of the point in question. “They were all too much masters of argument not “to see how greatly that very concession was in “their favour.” But why, then, did they not make use of it for that purpose? He adds, “And were “not the author of these pages convinced, as he “really is, upon better and firmer grounds, of the “truth and divine authority of the revelation by Je- “sus Christ; and had he an inclination to prejudice “the gospel in the opinion of thinking men; he “cannot imagine a stronger argument than might “be drawn against it, from the objectionable, con- “tradictory passages contained in those books, on “a supposition that they were all actually written by “its first and most authoritative teachers.” But if Christianity had been in any real danger from this quarter, it must have appeared long before this time. For the four Gospels were from the first as open to examination and objection as they are now; and if the contradictions were such as could never be discovered before, they could not be very glaring ones, or such as the Christian world had any thing to apprehend from. Whatever be the views of Mr. Evanston, other persons, as quick-sighted as he, would not have spared Christianity on this account.

Mr. Evanston speaks in general terms of the *corrupt Christianity* of those who, in his opinion, forged the three Gospels, and the Epistles that he ob-
jects

jects to. But he should have stated what those corruptions were, and have shewn the probability of the persons to whom he ascribes the fabrication of them, having written them in that particular manner. He will not, for instance, pretend that they were favourers of the doctrine of transubstantiation who wrote those books, notwithstanding some passages in them are alleged in support of that doctrine, because it is certain that no such doctrine was entertained in so early an age. Now the greatest corruption of Christianity, and one that in Mr. Evan-son's opinion, as well as my own, is the foundation of most of the rest, was the exaltation of the person of Jesus Christ to the rank of a superangelic being, or of God. But there was no opinion of this nature in the period to which Mr. Evan-son is confined besides that of the Gnostics, who never had it in their power to impose any books on the rest of the Christian world. And if any Trinitarians, of whom history gives no account, had been concerned in the fabrication of those books, they would never have made them so favourable as they now are to the Unitarian doctrine.

Would any other than a strict Unitarian have made our Saviour uniformly speak of himself as nothing more than *a man*, as he always does in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, to say, that *of himself he could do nothing*, but that *the Father within him did the works*? Or when, in a figurative sense,

sense, he spake of his being *one with the Father*, would he have explained it of such an union as subsisted between himself and his disciples, and between them all and God? Also the epistles that Mr. Evan-son rejects are all Unitarian.

Submitting these remarks to your candid attention,

I am, Sir, &c.

LETTER

LETTER III.

*Of the Preference given by Mr. Evanfon to the Gospel
of Luke.*

DEAR SIR,

HAVING considered what Mr. Evanfon has advanced on the subject of the evangelical history in general, I shall add a few observations on his reasons for giving so decided a preference, as he does, to the Gospel of Luke; and to me it appears to be perfectly arbitrary, without any proper evidence, external or internal, in favour of its superior authenticity.

He says, p. 24, that "the histories of Luke were "certainly the first in the order of time." But Origen, who lived nearer to the time of their publication, says, that "according to tradition, the first "Gospel was written by Matthew, once a publican, "and afterwards a disciple of Christ." Lardner's Works, vol. vi. p. 49. This Gospel is also alluded to by Clemens Romanus, the earliest of all the Christian writers after the apostles, and the genuineness of whose epistle is allowed by Mr. Evanfon himself. And if we examine the testimony of all the
antients,

antients, detailed at full length by Dr. Lardner, we shall not find any preference whatever given to the Gospel of Luke, either as written more early, or in any other respect of more value, than the others. On the contrary, the preference is always given to the Gospels of Matthew and John, as written by eye-witnesses, whereas it was thought that Mark and Luke could only collect, and digest, the evidence of others. But Mr. Evanfon writes as if he had never heard either of Mr. Jones or Dr. Lardner, or of the evidence produced by them in favour of the present canon.

Mr. Evanfon says, p. 114, that "Luke's work" itself very strongly implies that Matthew had "written no gospel at all before the fourth year of Nero," meaning before he himself wrote. But all that can be inferred from what Luke really says, is, that he had not *seen* any satisfactory account of the life of Christ before he undertook his, and therefore that he had not seen the Gospel of Matthew or Mark, which are nearly as large and full as his own. Dr. Lardner more naturally infers from this circumstance, that all the three evangelists wrote about the same time, unknown to each other, viz. A. D. 63, 64, or 65; and the circumstances of the Christian church at that time, viz. the approach of the dispersion of the apostles, and other primitive Christians, by the Jewish war, would lead Christians in different and distant places to desire to have some written account of what they
had

had been taught concerning Christ; and for this purpose they would naturally apply to those whom they thought the best qualified to give them the information they wanted.

The account of Theodore of Mopsuestia, from such evidence as he could collect, and though late, yet before the loss of any of the writings of the primitive Christians, of which we now complain, appears very natural. “When Peter went to Rome, “and John to Ephesus, about this time, the other “evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, published “their Gospels, which were soon spread over all “the world, and were received by all the faithful in “general with great regard. Nevertheless, the Chris- “tians of Asia brought those Gospels to John, ear- “nestly entreating him to write a farther account of “such things as were needful to be known, and “had been omitted by the others, and with this re- “quest he complied.” Lardner’s Works, vol. vi. P. 37.

In consequence of this, the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, would be written about the same time, and that of John not long after; and there is nothing in any of the Gospels that is unfavourable to this supposition.

Mr. Evanfon lays great stress on the writer of the Gospel of Luke intimating that he was the companion of Paul, whereas, he adds, p. 21, “the “Gospels according to Matthew and Mark contain “not the slightest insinuation that their authors were
“apostles

"apostles of Jesus Christ, or even men of the apostolic age." But the same objection might be made to the authenticity of many of the books of the Old and New Testament, and other antient writings, the authors not mentioning their own names, or speaking of themselves in the third person. We believe that Moses, and others, wrote the books that are ascribed to them from the testimony of those who first received them, and who transmitted them to posterity. It is not a writer's calling himself the author of any book, or his indirectly intimating that he was present at the transactions that he relates, that will ensure our belief of it. We must know that such assertions, or intimations, were credited at the time of the publication. This is our only authority for the facts. It is on this evidence that we believe that Julius Cæsar, and Tacitus, wrote the books that are ascribed to them.

According to universal uncontradicted tradition, the writers of the Gospels of Matthew and John were eye-witnesses of what they relate; and there is nothing in the narratives that is inconsistent with this supposition, but many circumstances highly favourable to it; whereas, according to Luke himself, he was only a collector of the evidence of others.

We are, no doubt, furnished by Luke with the date of his works, viz. soon after Paul had been two years prisoner at Rome. But there is no evidence whatever that Matthew, or Mark, wrote later; and the similar manner in which they all in-

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troduce

roduce the prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, makes it highly probable that they all wrote in similar circumstances with respect to that event, viz. before it took place.

Mr. Evanfon lays great stress on *Silas* being the real author of the books that now bear the name of *Luke*. But admitting this, I do not know that it will add to the authority that they would be entitled to from the consideration of their being written by any other companion of Paul, as the writer, whatever might be his name, certainly was. The criticism is by many thought ingenious, but it appears to me to be ill founded. Had it been just, I should have expected some intimation of it in some early Christian writer, whereas none of them appear to have had any such idea.

Mr. Evanfon says, p. 106, that "the author of the Acts of the Apostles himself informs us that his name was Silas, that he was one of the chief men among the brethren, &c." But this Mr. Evanfon is certainly not authorized to say. All that he can pretend is, that it may be *inferred* from circumstances that the author of the book was Silas. But surely that high commendation of himself is not favourable to Mr. Evanfon's hypothesis.

Besides, if it was this writer's custom to speak of himself in the first person, as is evident from his sometimes saying *we* did so and so; why did he not do so *uniformly*, and instead of saying, (ch. xvi. 20,) *they went out of prison*, when himself was
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one of them, say, *We went out of prison?* This he never does, when Silas was certainly one of the company. I wonder it should not have struck Mr. Evanfon himself to observe that from Acts xvi. 10, to ver. 17, *we* or *us* occurs in almost every verse; but that immediately after, whenever Paul and Silas only are mentioned, the style changes to *they* and *them*.

It is not natural for a writer to call the same person by two different names, unless he somewhere signify that they do mean the same person. Now in two epistles, viz. 2 Cor. i. 19, and 1 Theff. i. 1, Paul mentions *Silvanus*, which is not doubted to be the same with *Silas*, who otherwise is never mentioned by Paul at all; and in three epistles, viz. Col. iv. 14, 2 Tim. iv. 11, and Philemon, v. 24, he mentions *Luke*. It is natural, therefore, to conclude that *Silas*, or *Silvanus*, and *Luke*, were different persons.

Mr. Evanfon says, p. 107, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles must have been Silas because only he and Timothy went with him “through Phrygia and Galatia, and came to Troas, where “Paul, in a vision, was directed to go over into “Macedonia; and after he had seen the vision, “says the author, immediately *we* endeavoured to “go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering, that the “Lord had called *us* to preach the Gospel unto “them. This is the first passage in which the writer speaks in his own person, and in the same per-

“son, he frequently expresses himself afterwards “to the end of his history.” But it is no where said that, though Silas and Timothy were with Paul in this journey, he had no other companions, and Luke might join them at Troas.

He adds, p. 108, “as it is evident, from this part “of the Acts compared with 2 Cor. c. i. v. 19. “and with the address of both the epistles to the “Thessalonians, that St. Paul had no attendants, “when he first preached the gospel in Macedonia “and Greece, besides Silas or Silvanus, of which “last name Silas is merely an abbreviation, and “Timotheus; one of those two must be professedly “the writer of these histories. That it was not “Timotheus appears from Acts c. xx. v. 4 and 5, “where the author enumerates Timotheus amongst “those disciples who accompanied Paul, on his return “into Asia, and adds, these going before, tarried for “us at Troas.” But what Paul says is only this. *For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, &c.* and this was at Corinth, where Luke might not be with them, or might not have particularly distinguished himself by preaching. On such weak foundations is this hypothesis founded.

Mr. Evanfon infers that the Gospels of Matthew and Mark were written after that of Luke, because they contain not only many of the same particulars, but sometimes in the same words. “A work,” says he,

he, p. 159, "so evidently borrowed, in many passages and in some literally transcribed from St. Luke, and in all the rest of it so badly written, cannot be a translation of any original Hebrew work; but must have been composed, in the very form in which we have received it, long after the publication of the Gospel of Luke, and consequently not by St. Matthew, nor any other apostle."

But similar things being found in all these gospels, is no more a proof that Matthew or Mark copied Luke, than that he copied them; and the similarity is easily accounted for without supposing that any of them copied from the others, since there might be imperfect but authentic accounts of many of the particulars, which were equally in the hands of them all, and which might be copied, with more or less variation, by them all. That there were such imperfect accounts, is expressly asserted by Luke, and is natural in itself.

Many persons, no doubt, would be careful to commit to writing such accounts of the discourses and miracles of Christ as they heard from the apostles and other early preachers of Christianity. Many of these might be compared, and means might be used, while the preachers were accessible, to get them authenticated; and from these scattered writings, as well as from their own recollection, and other evidence, might the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, be composed. This natural supposition easily accounts for the resemblance

we sometimes find between these writers, and it is, on several accounts, exceedingly improbable that any of them would have borrowed from the others without acknowledgment, and least of all that any of them have *abridged* any of the others, as many now suppose.

The evangelists were not writers by profession, and therefore cannot be supposed to have written such books as the *Gospels*, if they had known of any accounts of the discourses and miracles of Christ so well calculated to answer their own views as any of the others manifestly were. As to *abridgments*, they are always made to bring a work into less compass. But all the Gospels are nearly of the same size, and the evangelist who gives a more succinct account of some particulars, gives a fuller account of others, which an abridger would not have done. Also, a person who had only proposed to abridge the work of another, would never have thought of departing from the order of the narrative before him; and yet no two of the evangelists relate things in any thing like the same order.

Still less would an abridger think of contradicting his author, as the evangelists must knowingly have done, if they had any of the other gospels before them at the time of their writing. Least of all would they have done it in things of small consequence, for which there could not have been any motive. It is often said that Mark has abridged Matthew; but if this had been the case, would he,
besides

besides departing wholly from the order of Matthew, whose narrative he must have considered as the best authority (since he was present at the transactions, and himself not) have differed from his author in such a circumstance as the day on which Jesus purged the temple, to mention no other points of difference? If any writer vary from another whom he has before him, it must be for what appears to him a sufficient reason; and so far he must be considered as an original writer, having some other authority for what he advances. There are, besides, many things in Mark that are not to be found in Matthew, or Luke.

As to the inconsistencies that are found in the different evangelists, of which Mr. Evanfon says, p. 1, "those evangelical writers contain such gross
"and irreconcilable contradictions, that no close
"reasoning unprejudiced mind can admit the
"truth and authenticity of them all;" nothing can be inferred from them, but that the authors did not write in concert, and did not copy from one another, a circumstance highly favourable to the authenticity of their writings. But these things are much exaggerated by Mr. Evanfon, who says, Preface, p. vi. "there are many obvious
"inconsistencies and improbabilities in several of
"the canonical scriptures, which it was impossible
"to account for, on a supposition that the authors
"were men of that veracity and information of their
"subject, which must be expected from the apos-

"tles and other miraculously gifted disciples of Jesus Christ."—"That many of those scriptures which form the most essential part of the canon of the apostate church must be fabulous and false, seems as certain," he says, p. viii, "as that the word of God is true."

Had any person who contended for the plenary inspiration of the scriptures advanced this argument, I should not have wondered at it, but that Mr. Evanston should do it, and admit, as I doubt not he does, that the authors of them wrote without any inspiration at all, and a considerable time after the events (in consequence of which it was natural to expect many variations in their accounts) does surprise me not a little. They might all be very honest men, and in the main well informed with respect to what they undertook to relate, and yet write their several narratives with all the variations that we find in them. Few persons have noted more real inconsistencies in the different evangelists than myself, as may be seen in the *Dissertations prefixed to my Harmony of the Gospels*; but it never occurred to me that they furnished any objection to the authenticity of any of them.

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER IV.

Of the Gospel of Matthew in general.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING considered what Mr. Evanfon has advanced for his opinion concerning the preference to be given to the Gospel of Luke, before those of Matthew, Mark, and John, I shall attend to what he says of each of them in particular.

Of Matthew he says, p. 115, "The author himself gives not the slightest hint to suggest to us who he was, much less that he was an Apostle of Jesus Christ; so that the mere opinion of the fathers of the orthodox church of the second century is all the foundation there is for its being called St. Matthew's, which, we have seen, is not the case with St. Luke's histories."

But the opinion of the fathers of the orthodox church of the second century (an expression intended to imply contempt) was not an opinion taken up by themselves; it evidently had its origin in an earlier age; and as no reason can be imagined why this Gospel should have been uniformly ascribed to Matthew, rather than to any of the other apostles, or primitive Christians, there is no reasonable cause of doubt

doubt on the subject. If we were to inquire into the reasons why the poems of Virgil or Horace are ascribed to them, we shall find it to be of the same kind, but by no means so full and satisfactory.

Besides that the Gospel of Matthew, as well as those of Mark and Luke, are plainly alluded to by Clemens Romanus, who wrote A. D. 96, which is little more than thirty years after it was published; Papias of Hierapolis, who wrote about A. D. 116, and is supposed to have been acquainted with the Apostle John, mentions the Gospel of Matthew by name. Lardner's Works, vol. vi. p. 49. Irenæus, who was born in Asia, and who was acquainted with Polycarp, a disciple of John, and who wrote about A. D. 178, says, "Matthew, then among the Jews, wrote a Gospel in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching the gospel at Rome, and founding the church there." In another place he says, "The Gospel according to Matthew was delivered to the Jews." Eusebius says, that "Matthew, having first preached to the Hebrews, when he was about to go to other people, delivered to them, in their own language, the Gospel according to him, by that writing supplying the want of his presence with those whom he was leaving." Ib. p. 49. Lastly, Jerom says, that "Matthew, called also Levi, of a publican made an apostle, wrote a Gospel in Judea, in the Hebrew language. Who afterwards translated it into Greek is uncertain."

How

How will Mr. Evanfon account for this uniform tradition, beginning fo early, and transmitted without the leaft objection from any of the discordant fefts of Chriftians (for if this had not been the cafe, it would certainly have appeared) in any confiftency with his own notion of its having fo late a date as he afcribes to it?

“ If,” fays he, p. 22, “ we inquire how the Gospel received as Matthew’s came to be in Greek, “ if he wrote it in Hebrew; the fame writers inform “ us, that it was afterwards tranflated into Greek: “ but we find, nobody knows when, nobody knows “ where, and nobody knows by whom.”

This remark refpecting the *translation* by no means affects the authenticity of the work itfelf; it being fufficient that early and uniform tradition afcribes this Gospel to Matthew, though it varies with refpect to the circumftance of the *language* in which it was written. This, being of far lefs confequence, would not be fo much attended to. I am of opinion with Dr. Lardner (Works, vol. vi. p. 62), that it bears no marks of a tranflation; and I fee no reason why Matthew, who, from his employment, was probably better acquainted with the Greek language than the reft of the Apoftles, fhould write in any other language than that in which they did. His Gospel might have been tranflated by himfelf, or fome other perfon under his infpection, into Hebrew; and this being the only Gospel ufed by the Hebrew Chriftians, it would naturally be fupposed that it was
written

written originally in their language. The Gospel which usually bore the name of that *of the Hebrews*, and *of the Nazarenes*, used by the Ebionite Christians, Lardner, with great probability, thinks was the Gospel of Matthew translated from the Greek, with the addition of some things taken from other Gospels, and from tradition. Ib. p. 64.

Mr. Evanfon supposes the Gospels of Matthew and Mark to have been written in a late period on account of there being in them some Latin words in Greek characters, p. 117, 213, contrary, as he says, to the custom of all original writers in Greek prior to the reign of Trajan.

After ridiculing, as many unbelievers have done, the story of Jesus driving the cattle out of the temple with a whip made of small cords, in the Gospel of John, he says, "It is to be observed also, p. 225, that
 " this supposed Apostle, in recording the instrument
 " of violence constructed and used by our Saviour
 " in this extraordinary manner, expresses it by a
 " word neither of Greek nor Hebrew origin, but
 " by a Latin word barbarously written in Greek characters, which, as I have observed in the case of
 " the two preceding Evangelists, of itself affords
 " strong grounds of presumption, that whoever the
 " writer may be said to be, he did not live till after
 " the beginning of the second century; and when
 " corroborated with other circumstances so highly
 " improbable in themselves, and so directly contradictory to the history of St. Luke, is a very satisfactory

“ factory proof that he was no Apostle, nor any Jew,
“ nor even a respectable Greek convert of the apos-
“ tolic age ; but one of the many composers of spu-
“ rious and fabulous writings of the second century ;
“ and that he deserves not the least credit or atten-
“ tion.”

But who can be authorized to say at what precise period such a custom as this commenced, or how the custom might vary in different places, and with different persons, when nothing was necessary to introduce it, but an acquaintance with Latin terms, in consequence of the extension of the Roman empire, which had in fact embraced Judea a century before the writing of the Gospels ? To say, with Mr. Evanston, that such a practice as this might be common in the time of Trajan, who came to the empire A. D. 98, and not be known A. D. 64, is not a little extraordinary. To distinguish with so much accuracy as this, a man must have a more nice discernment in the chronology of language, than Sancho Panza's father had in wine ; who perceived a twang of iron, and also of leather, in a cask, at the bottom of which was afterwards found a key with a leathern thong tied to it.

The lateness of the writing of the Gospel of Matthew is also inferred by Mr. Evanston from the phrase *unto this day*, which occurs in it. But surely a period of thirty years, which elapsed between the transactions and the time of writing, is sufficient to account

count for this. Or such a sentence as this might have been originally written in the margin of some valuable copy, and afterwards have been inserted in the text, which no critic denies to have been the case with similar expressions in other books.

The writer of the Gospel ascribed to Matthew, Mr. Evanfon says, p. 23, "did not understand the "prophecies of the Jewish scriptures." But, surely, it does not follow from this, that the writer might not be an apostle. Peter misapplied the scriptures in his famous speech on the day of Pentecost, as evidently as the writer of this Gospel, whoever he was. I am surprised at such an argument as this from a man who, in other respects, thinks so freely as Mr. Evanfon does.

Some of the grossest of these misapplications of scripture occur in the two first chapters of Matthew, which contain the account of the miraculous conception of Jesus. But was it right in Mr. Evanfon to take it for granted that these two chapters were written by the author of the rest of the book, when it must be known to him, that many persons think they have good reason for concluding that they were not; especially as the Gospel used by the Jewish Christians, which was the same in substance with that of Matthew, had not these two chapters? With a slight variation this Gospel has a natural and regular beginning at the third chapter, which is also the case with that of Luke, without the change of a single

word; though there is not so much external evidence of *this* Gospel having been originally without its present introduction.

Mr. Evanfon has suggested several new and valuable arguments against the miraculous conception, for which I and others think ourselves greatly obliged to him. But we do not apprehend that he has by this means at all invalidated the authenticity of the rest of the Gospels of Matthew or Luke, which in their present state contain that account. Mr. Evanfon himself is but too ready to suppose interpolations of passages in those books the genuineness of which he admits. But that a passage is weak and injudicious is no good reason why it might not have been written in the age of the Apostles, or by some of the Apostles themselves. He admits the epistle of Clemens Romanus to be genuine; but he says, p. 11, "it is evidently corrupted by the interpolation of the absurd Pagan fable of the Phenix." But absurd, and Pagan, as it is, what proof has Mr. Evanfon that Clemens might not believe it? I have no doubt but he did; and I see no reason why any other person, who must have been a Christian, should have inserted it. If the person who made the interpolation believed the story, why might not Clemens himself have believed it?

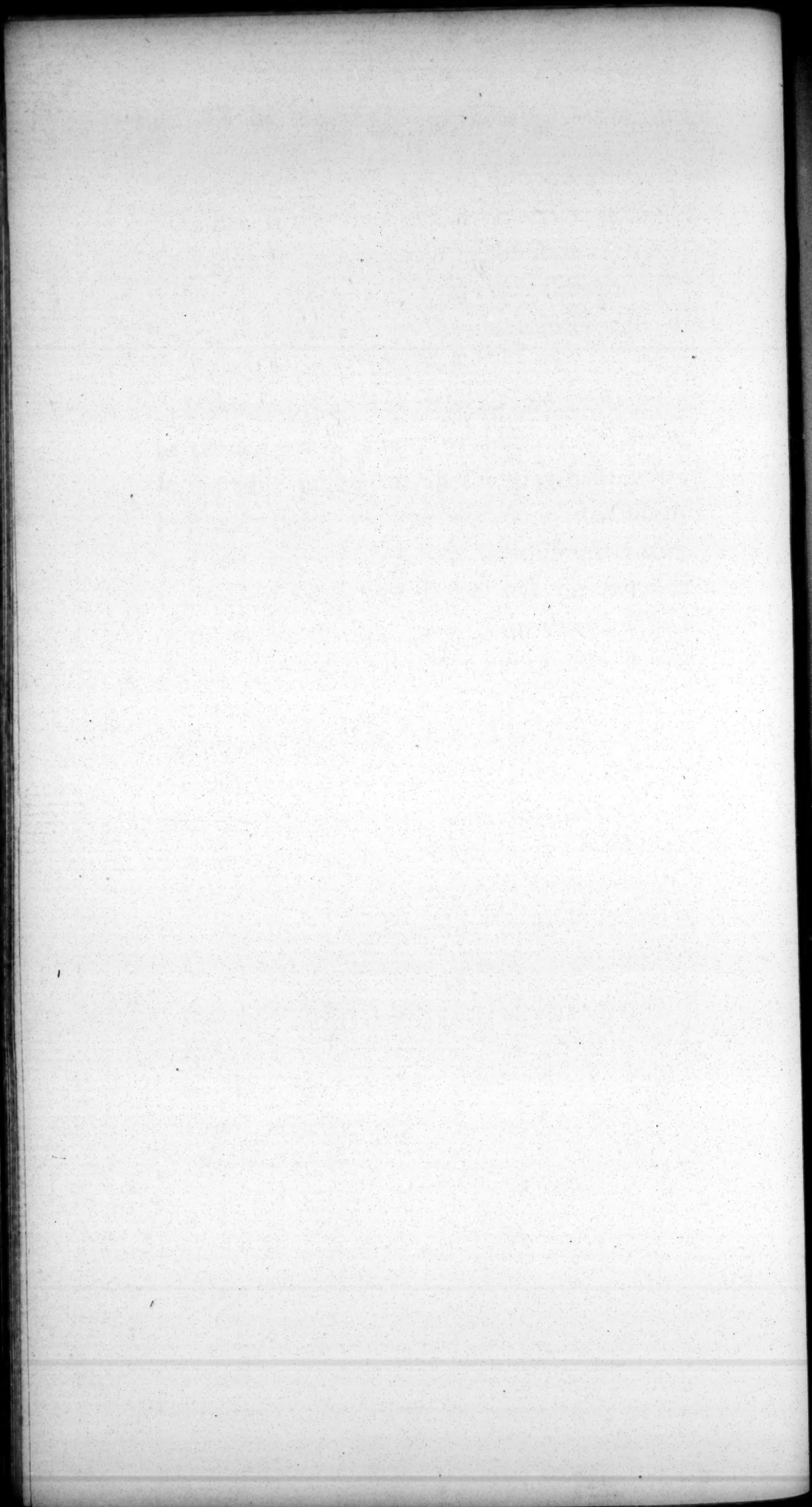
In the same arbitrary manner Mr. Evanfon supposes the writings of Luke himself to have been interpolated. "There are some others," he says, p. 25, "in this history, which are liable to much

“reasonable distrust. Such, for instance, in this Gospel, is the story of the demoniac possessed by a legion of demons, and in the Acts of the Apostles, the passage which says that diseases and lunacies were cured by handkerchiefs and aprons brought from Paul’s body.”

If every person was thus at liberty to pick what he pleased out of antient writings, as the young wife in the fable pulled up all the gray hairs out of the husband’s head, and the old wife all the black ones, nothing might be left. If Mr. Evanston had scrutinized the Gospel of Luke with the same severity with which he has gone over those of Matthew, Mark, and John, he might have found so many objectionable passages, as to have pronounced them all equally spurious. For at present the difference is only in degree, the three Gospels being, according to Mr. Evanston, absolutely spurious, because, in his opinion, they contain many objectionable passages, and that of Luke only interpolated, though it contains a considerable number of them. But he should give some good reason for supposing that such writers as the Apostles, and other unlearned primitive Christians, could not have written as they have done. That Mr. Evanston himself would not have written as they have done, is no evidence at all.

I am, &c.

LETTER



well as that of John, the kingdom of God was a future event, and therefore they might both very properly use the same language respecting it.

In another place Mr. Evanfon cavils at Matthew for representing our Saviour as comparing the kingdom of heaven to *a man who sowed good seed in his field*. "What idea," he says, p. 158, "must this writer have formed to himself of the meaning of *the kingdom of heaven*, that he could think of likening it to an husbandman? The kingdom of heaven, or, as it is always called by other writers, of God, or of Christ, as that phrase is used by Jesus in the prayer he taught his disciples, by Luke, Paul, and John in the apocalypse, uniformly signifies, as I have before observed, the dutiful state of submission and obedience of mankind to the terms of the new covenant of the gospel: and what similitude can there be between such a state of the world and the husbandman in this parable?"

But is there nothing in this beautiful parable representing the kingdom of heaven, if, in any sense, this kingdom means *the Gospel*, when the corruptions introduced into it are so happily described by the sowing of tares among the wheat? But it will not, I apprehend, be very easy for Mr. Evanfon to prove that he has entertained a just idea of the kingdom of heaven, which, according to Daniel, by whom it was first announced, will not take place before the destruction of the present kingdoms of this world, though the preaching of the Gospel,

as preparing the way for it, may, in a sufficiently proper sense, be so called.

Mr. Evanston indeed says, p. 160, " By the writer's giving that appellation to the future existence of the virtuous in a state of happiness and immortality in heaven, it is manifest that, whoever he was, he did not understand our Saviour's meaning in that expression so frequently used by him and so peculiar to his Gospel; for besides that no other writer of the new testament uses it in that sense, the obvious meaning of the second petition of the Lord's prayer and of all the prophecies of both testaments relating to the Messiah, or Christ, makes it refer merely to the state of human affairs in the present world, and not to that future state which is to succeed the general resurrection: and instead of teaching us, like this parable, that sin and wickedness will continue amongst men to the end of this world, all the other scriptures assure us, that the very purpose of the mission of Christ and the preaching of his Gospel is to eradicate, and put an end to the growth of these tares of vice and iniquity; and that the reformed state of mankind in the present world, under the universal influence of the righteousness and moral virtue of the Gospel, is what is peculiarly denominated *the kingdom of God*, or of his Christ. Who then can believe that an Apostle of Jesus Christ could either be so ignorant of the great end and design of the Gospel, or so culpably daring as to put into the mouth of

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“ our blessed Saviour a doctrine so absurdly false and
“ impious as is taught us in this parable, and so di-
“ rectly contradictory to every idea given us of the
“ new covenant of the Messiah by all the other sa-
“ cred writers, whether Jews or Christians?” —
“ Matthew,” he says, p. 175, “ since he considered
“ all the professed christians of his own time to be
“ called, and was sensible that but few of them, in
“ comparision of the whole number, were really vir-
“ tuous good men; and ignorantly supposed, that
“ such would be the state of the christian religion to
“ the end of the world; it was natural for him to
“ conclude, that those, whom God would finally ap-
“ prove at the day of judgment, would be very few
“ indeed. But had he been an apostle of Jesus
“ Christ, or had he understood the Gospel meaning
“ of *the kingdom of God*, or the sense of the old pro-
“ phecies respecting the state of the world under the
“ new covenant of the Messiah, he would have
“ known, that no immoral, bad man could be a
“ member of the true Church of Christ, whatever
“ his profession might be, and that, therefore, the
“ whole congregation of faithful Christians are de-
“ nominated the chosen or elect of God; and instead
“ of their being found to be few at the day of general
“ judgment and retribution; he would have known
“ also, that the very end and design of the religion
“ of Jesus Christ is *to bless all the families of the earth*
“ with the happy effects of its moral influence in the
“ present life; and that, when the marriage of the

“king’s son really takes place, righteousness will
 “overspread the earth as completely *as the waters*
 “*cover the sea.*” On the same account, Mr. Evan-
 son objects to the first parable of the ten virgins
 in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew. “Here
 “again,” he says, p. 179, “we have a just repre-
 “sentation of the state of mankind in general, un-
 “der every other system of religion; but not at all
 “suited to the circumstances that are predicted of
 “the world under the Gospel covenant, when it is
 “become *the kingdom of God.* This parable, there-
 “fore, is another proof that the writer either did not
 “comprehend, or, at least, did not believe the uni-
 “versal, moral reformation of that prophetic state
 “of man in the present life; and, consequently,
 “that he was not an Apostle of Jesus Christ.”

Now it happens unfortunately for Mr. Evan-
 son, that Luke himself, in a discourse ascribed by him to
 our Saviour, gives countenance to the idea of the
 great prevalence of unbelief, and consequently, as
 we must suppose, of vice and wickedness, before his
 second coming. For he makes him say, ch. xviii. 3,
Nevertheless, when the son of man cometh, shall he find
faith in the earth?

It is easy to shew that, according to Luke, as well
 as the other evangelists, the proper kingdom of God,
 or of Christ, is something different from that mere
 prevalence of virtue in which Mr. Evan-son supposes
 it to consist, though *this* will accompany it, and be
 promoted by it; and also that the commencement
 of

of it was posterior to the preaching of Christ. When the disciples *expected* (ch. xix.) that *the kingdom of God would immediately appear*, Jesus recited the parable of a certain nobleman, who went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return, and he did not receive the kingdom till his return. In the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, which was not to take place before forty years after his death, Jesus tells his disciples, ch. xxi. 31, that when they should see certain things come to pass, they were to know that *the kingdom of God was only nigh at hand*, and the commencement of this kingdom is there denoted, v. 27, by *the son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory*.

In this kingdom the apostles are to reign with Christ, xxii. 29. *And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as the Father has appointed unto me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*. This is certainly a very different kingdom from what Mr. Evanston imagines that of Christ to be; and because the writer of the Gospel of Matthew had not the same idea of it, he is unsparing of his abuse of him. In Luke Mr. Evanston will perhaps consider the passages quoted above, which agree so well with Matthew, as interpolations.

8. Because in the parable of a certain king who made a marriage feast for his son, Matthew represents the invitation as given to both good and bad, after the intended guests had declined accepting the invi-

tation, Mr. Evanfon says, p. 174, he has no doubt that “ he wrote long after the destruction of Jerusalem, and made the invitation to the Gentiles to “ accept the gospel covenant posterior to that calamity. The parable, therefore, in the first seven “ verses, refers only to the preaching the new covenant to the Jews; describes their cruel persecution “ of the apostles and first preachers of the Gospel, “ and the vengeance inflicted on them by heaven, “ in the utter ruin of their city and nation; *after* “ *which* the messengers of the gospel are ordered to “ go and preach it to the Gentiles. The manner, “ however, in which that is done in the parable, “ shews that the writer did not live in the age of St. “ Matthew, but at a time when Christianity was “ with great numbers a mere external profession, “ and the state of the church so corrupt, that the majority of its members were bad men: for, he tells “ us, the king’s servants furnished the wedding with “ guests by collecting together as “ many as they “ found, *both bad and good.*” This is a pretty accurate description of the state of *professed* Christianity, as it is at present, and as I am well convinced it was in the age of this writer, and has “ been ever since; but nothing can be more unlike “ the state of the true church of Christ, as it was “ founded by Matthew and the other apostles, and “ as, where it subsists at all, it must for ever continue to be: for the apostles and first preachers of “ the Gospel were so far from admitting bad men “ into

“into the christian society, that St. Paul strictly en-
“joins the Gentile converts, 1 Cor. v. 11, not to
“suffer any man who was guilty of any of the vices
“prohibited in the Gospel to remain a member of
“their community, nor to associate, nor even so
“much as to eat with him.”

According to this reasoning of Mr. Evanfon, our Saviour could not foretel the future state of his church, and no writer can record any prediction who has not seen the accomplishment of it. As to the latter part of Mr. Evanfon’s remark, the epistles of Paul furnish abundant proof, that there were persons addicted to many immoral practices among the first converts to Christianity, and that the belief of it operated gradually to the reformation of them.

9. Equally unreasonable is Mr. Evanfon’s caviling at the punishment of the man who did not appear in a *wedding garment*, though he had been pressed to attend the feast. “With respect to the
“guest who had not on a wedding garment,” p. 176, “whatever the author meant by that figurative expression, though the man, it seems, had nothing to say for himself, one cannot help pitying him: because, from the circumstances of the parable, he appears to have been in a manner *pressed* to attend at the marriage feast; and if any particular robe was necessary, since the king’s servants must see that he had none, they ought either to have supplied him with one, or not to have invited him at all; and it seems rather hard, that, in con-

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“sequence of their inattention or neglect, the un-
 “happy wretch should be *bound hand and foot, and*
 “*thrown into outer darkness, there to remain weeping*
 “*and gnashing his teeth.*”

Now it is well known to have been the custom in the East, for the master of the feast to provide such garments; and therefore that this man's not putting it on must have been a mark of contempt. This, however, is not like a circumstance that any writer would *invent*.

10. Mr. Evanfon finds many contradictions between Matthew's account of Jesus eating the last passover, and the institution of his supper, and that of Luke, and, as usual, greatly to the discredit of that of Matthew, as in the highest degree improbable. “The writer called Matthew,” he says, p. 185, “on the contrary, who instead of being a Jew himself, appears to have been very imperfectly acquainted with either the prophecies or customs of the Jews, takes not the least notice of the cup preceding the supper; and in telling us that the apology for his own not drinking of the wine was made by Jesus at the grace-cup, when he ordained the ceremony of the Lord's supper, he really betrays his own ignorance by teaching us that he did not begin the feast, as was customary, with the cup; for if he did, and the apology for his not drinking of it himself was given then, there could be no propriety in his repeating so soon after, at the grace-cup; especially when we con-
 “sider

“sider that the latter was proposed to them as a
“commencement of that commemorative rite of
“which he was to be the object, not the partaker:
“whereas the participation of the cup before the
“supper was the common form of beginning the
“Paschal feast, which, as a Jew, concerned him as
“much as his disciples.”

For this extraordinary remark the narrative of Matthew furnishes no handle whatever; as he does not profess to relate any particulars of the *paschal supper*, but only the institution of the *Lord's Supper*, with which it concluded. And when, in this rite, Jesus had tasted the wine for the last time, he very naturally observed, that he should not drink any more wine in this world, or state. It appears to me that this declaration of Jesus is put by Luke out of its proper place, because, according to this evangelist himself, he partook both of the bread and the wine after it. But I should not infer from this oversight, or mistake, whichever it was, that the Gospel of Luke was not authentic.

11. Mr. Evanfon thinks some circumstances relating to the behaviour of Pilate to Jesus, as related by Matthew, to be improbable. “I cannot forbear
“remarking,” he says, p. 195, “that as Pilate was
“convinced of our Lord's innocence and inoffensive
“behaviour, and sacrificed him to the clamorous
“entreaties of the Jews, against his own judgment
“and inclination, it is not at all consistent with the
“polished humanity of the Romans, that he should
“have

“ have subjected him to any unnecessary, barbarous
 “ and cruelly insulting treatment from the Roman
 “ soldiers; that, according to St. Luke, the gorgeous robe and contemptuous mockings were put
 “ upon him, not by them but by Herod; and that
 “ his history of the crucifixion makes no mention of
 “ the crown of thorns, nor of the other wanton indignities attributed to the Roman soldiers by this
 “ writer.”

But I would ask Mr. Evanston, whether the punishment of crucifixion was consistent with *polished humanity*? It is, besides, very possible that Pilate, who evidently wished to spare Jesus, might hope that his enemies would be sufficiently gratified by seeing him abused and insulted, without crucifixion. Nor is it necessary to suppose that any thing farther than *mockery* was intended. Mr. Evanston must know that the crown was probably made of the herb *acanthus*, and not of *thorns*, none of the ancients appearing so to have understood it.

12. Mr. Evanston, besides thinking it improbable that Jesus should have appointed a meeting with his disciples in Galilee (though, considering how many of his disciples were of that country, nothing could be more natural), thinks it extraordinary that, “ contrary,” as he says, p. 202, “ to what he ever did at any other time, they worshipped him; notwithstanding some of them were so incredulous, as not to believe the testimony of their senses.”

Now that the disciples should feel themselves disposed

posed to shew their Lord and master more particular respect, by *bowing down before him* (for that Mr. Evanfon knows to be the proper meaning of the word which we render *worship*) after he was most unexpectedly risen from the dead, appears to me not at all extraordinary. Mr. Evanfon himself could not behave with his former familiarity, even to an intimate friend in the same circumstances. He also had not, I suppose, observed that this *worshipping* of Jesus after his resurrection, is mentioned by Luke as well as Matthew, and in a manner more liable to exception: for it might be even after his ascension. Luke xxiv. 51, 52. *And it came to pass while he blessed them he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.*

As to the *doubts* mentioned by the Evangelist, it is by no means probable, though the expression rigorously construed might imply as much, that Matthew meant to say, that the doubts of these disciples remained *after* they had seen him; since he gives no intimation of any remaining doubts. Or, if, like Thomas, they did not believe the evidence of their eyes, they might be convinced, as he was, by that of their other senses.

I am, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R VII.

*Of the things that Mr. Evanſon objects to as unworthy
of our Saviour in the Gospel of Matthew.*

DEAR SIR,

I RESERVE for this Letter the conſideration of another claſs of improbabilities that Mr. Evanſon finds in the diſcourſes of Jeſus recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, they being, in his opinion, ſuch as neither Matthew, nor any other perſon who really heard our Lord's diſcourſes, could have related of him.

1. According to Matthew, ch. xii. 39, Jeſus declared to the Pharifees, who demanded of him a ſign from heaven, that *no ſign ſhould be given to that generation, but the ſign of the prophet Jonas; for that as Jonas was three days and three nights in the belly of a fiſh, ſo he ſhould be three days and three nights in the earth.*

On this Mr. Evanſon remarks as follows. “ The
“ writer uſually called St. Matthew,” p. 74, “ with-
“ out the leaſt reaſon or propriety, makes this ſimi-
“ litude between Jonas and our Saviour to conſiſt
“ in the time that the former was in the whale's
“ belly and the latter in the grave; but if the fabu-
“ lous

“ lous interpolation of the two first chapters of the
“ Book of Jonah, (to which Mendelsohn the late
“ learned Jew of Berlin, assures us no reasonable
“ Jew ever pays the least regard,) could be true;
“ yet whosoever compares the geographical situa-
“ tion of Nineveh with respect to the Mediterranean
“ Sea, will be convinced that nothing transacted
“ upon that sea could fall under the notice of the
“ inhabitants of Nineveh, nor consequently be any
“ sign to them at all.” Again he says, p. 153,
“ At verse 40, the author, not understanding our
“ Lord’s meaning about the sign which Jonas was
“ to the Ninevites as recorded by St. Luke, not
“ only shews that his credulity easily swallowed the
“ fabulous legend of the prophet in the whale’s
“ belly; but in order to make out some kind of
“ similitude between his situation there and our Sa-
“ viour’s, tells us that as Jonas was confined in
“ that extraordinary prison three nights and three
“ days, so the Son of man should be *three days*
“ *and three nights* in the heart of the earth. Even
“ this pretended similitude, however, has not one
“ corresponding feature in the two parts; for, in
“ the first place, our Lord was in the grave only
“ one day and two nights; and, in the next, Jonas
“ according to this incredible story was alive the
“ whole time, praying to and praising God, whereas
“ Jesus was amongst the dead and buried, of whom
“ the Psalmist says, the dead praise not thee, O
“ Lord, neither they that go down into silence.”

Mr.

Mr. Evanfon, therefore, greatly prefers the account of Luke, who contents himself with faying that Jonas was a fign to that generation: “the real fignification of which,” he fays, “was, that as Nineveh “was to be deftroyed forty days, or years, after “the preaching of Jonah, fo would the Jews after “the fame period, if they did not repent.”

This, however, is not the interpretation of Luke, who, for any thing Mr. Evanfon knows, would have fuggelted the fame idea that Matthew does, if, like him, he had given any explanation of the fign at all, but that of Mr. Evanfon’s. And though Jonah was alive, and Jefus dead, there was fomething very remarkable in their continuing in a ftate fo nearly alike, the fame fpace of time. Befides, the proper evidence of the divine miffion of Jefus was his refurrection, and not the fulfilment of his prophecy concerning the deftruction of Jerufalem; and what the Pharifees demanded of him was a proof of his miffion. That the phrafe *three days and three nights* only means *the third day*, I need not prove to any perfon acquainted with the Jewish phrafeology.

2. To the advice of Jefus, *not to give that which is holy to the dogs, and not to caft pearls before fwine*, Matt. vii. 6, Mr. Evanfon objects in the following extraordinary manner. “In chap. vii. 6, we find a “vulgar proverb,” p. 148, “antecedent to the miffion of Jefus Chrift, converted into a precept of “the Gofpel, Give not that which is holy unto the “dogs, neither caft ye your pearls before fwine,

“least they trample them under their feet and turn
“again and rent you.” If these words have any
“meaning in this place, it must be to prohibit the
“teaching his holy religion and propounding the
“valuable doctrines of the Gospel to such profligate,
“profane, and brutal characters as it was probable
“would only treat their instructions with scorn and
“contempt, and reward their zeal with persecution
“and personal violence. Yet such a precept is di-
“rectly contrary to the well-known constant prac-
“tice of our Lord himself and all his Apostles, and
“utterly repugnant to the most explicit, repeated
“lessons of duty urged upon his disciples on other
“occasions, the uniform tenor of which is, that in
“preaching the gospel they must expect and be pre-
“pared to endure odium, contempt and ignominy,
“and the most cruel persecutions of every kind,
“even unto death.”

On the contrary, our Saviour's direction is such
a dictate of prudence as he gave on other occasions,
and such as is perfectly right and reasonable in
itself. For why should a man expose himself to
danger with no prospect of doing any good, but only
of receiving harm? Did not Jesus advise his dis-
ciples not to expose themselves to persecution unne-
cessarily, but when they were persecuted in one city
to flee to another; and in general to be *wise as ser-*
pents as well as harmless as doves. And if Mr. Evan-
son question the authenticity of the books which
contain these precepts, did not both himself and the
apostles

apostles conduct themselves, on several occasions, according to these maxims?

3. In the beautiful parable of the sower, ch. xiii. which Mr. Evanston says was "in part copied from Luke, but with several variations for the worse," (for which, however, it would be difficult to imagine a motive in a real copier) Mr. Evanston is particularly offended at our Saviour's saying, ver. 23, *He that receiveth the seed into good ground is he that beareth the word, and understandeth it, which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth some an hundred, some sixty, and some thirty*, as if he intended to intimate that moral improvement depended upon the *intellectual abilities* of men; and therefore he prefers the account of Luke, who ascribes the improvement to *a good and honest heart*. "The intellectual abilities of men," he says, p. 157, "indeed vary as greatly as the degrees of their bodily strength, but in capacity for moral virtue they are all equal; the weakest and most illiterate may possess as honest and as good a heart as the wisest and most exalted genius that ever lived: the moral virtue of the latter, may have a more extensive influence than that of the former, but that difference is merely accidental; his heart cannot be justly represented as a better and more fruitful soil in its proportion, though it might, with propriety, be compared to a more extensive field of equally productive soil, whose produce must of consequence be more extensively beneficial."

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This appears to me to be mere cavilling, and, indeed, an unfair interpretation of Matthew's language, who evidently distinguishes between *understanding the word* (which, however, Mr. Evanston will not deny to be necessary to any improvement of it) and *bearing fruit*, by the particle *also*, as depending upon something else than the mere understanding it, and what that was required no explanation. Besides, it is usual with the sacred writers to refer all mental excellence to the same seat, viz. the *heart*. Prov. xxiii. 15. *If thy heart be wise*. We are not to expect from them metaphysical exactness.

To the parable of the talents Mr. Evanston objects as follows, p. 180. "The pretended Matthew, on
"the contrary, makes him distribute his talents in the
"most partial unequal manner, one only to one of
"his followers, twice as many to another, and five
"times as many to a third, as he himself expresses
"it, "to every man *according to his abilities*," as if
"the religious instruction of that gospel so peculiarly preached to the poorest and most illiterate was
"not equally intelligible to men of all capacities and
"degrees." But is it not a fact that, though the precepts of the gospel be equally intelligible to all persons, some are placed in situations in which they have a better opportunity of improving by it, and of diffusing the knowledge of it to others, besides many other advantages of a different kind, with which the rest of mankind are not favoured? All

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men have not the abilities, the knowledge, or the leisure, that Mr. Evanfon has. But will he say that, in this various distribution of advantages, the Supreme Being is blameably partial?

4. A still more unworthy cavil is what Mr. Evanfon objects to what Jesus said about the source of moral defilement. "In chapter xv. 11, we have "the following" p. 164, "curious piece of instruction addressed to the multitude; "Not that "which goeth into the mouth defileth a man: but "that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth "a man:" and at v. 15, this is called a parable. "Surely this writer did not consider what constitutes a parable, when he called it by that name; "for here is no similitude nor allegorical allusion "whatsoever, but a plain didactic aphorism so very "perspicuous, that even the explanation of it, said "to be given to the disciples at the request of St. "Peter in the 17th and following verses, is not in "any degree more intelligible, though much more "absurd: for with what propriety can *evil thoughts*, "murders, and thefts, be said to proceed out of the "mouth? Indeed to say that any thing which proceeds out of the mouth, or even out of the heart, "of man defileth him, is as absurd as it were to "say, that the turbid stream which flows from a "polluted fountain, defileth the fountain."

By *parable* the Jews meant any enigmatical saying. Thus Balaam, who only blessed Israel, and prophesied, is said, Num. xxiii. 7, to have *taken up*
his

his parable. Solomon, Prov. xxvi. 1, speaks of *a parable in the mouth of fools.* Job also is said to have used parables, when he introduced no comparison, chap. xxvii. 1. If evil thoughts be expressed in words, they may, surely, be said to come out of the mouth of him that delivers them, and to imply impurity in the heart in which they are conceived, which is sufficient to justify the propriety of the language.

5. Mr. Evanfon strongly objects to the parable of the king who took an account of his servants, Matt. 18; but chiefly, p. 166, because “after an absolute unconditional forgiveness once granted, he recalled the pardon, and exacted the payment of the debt, on account of the man not shewing mercy to his debtor.” “This,” says Mr. Evanfon, “is downright tyranny and injustice.” It is agreeable, however, to the maxims of the divine government, as expressed in numerous passages of scripture, all the promises, as well as the threatenings of God, being, in fact, conditional, and revocable in case of misbehaviour; so that the lesson is highly important, and useful.

6. That our Saviour frequently chose to speak in a figurative and enigmatical manner, perhaps to exercise the understandings of his hearers, is evident. Such was his saying that *some men made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake*, Matt. xix. 12, evidently meaning, their choosing to lead a single life. Mr. Evanfon, however, will have

this to be understood literally, and on this grounds the following curious conclusions. "In chap. xix. ver. 12, the author," p. 167, "very inadvertently, puts into the mouth of our Saviour an expression which plainly betrays the age in which this spurious gospel was written, and the particular sect of apostate Christians which he himself favoured; for in reply to a remark of the disciples upon a pretended condemnation of the divorces allowed by the Mosaic Law, our Lord is made to say that "there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb; and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs, which *have made themselves* eunuchs, *for the kingdom of heaven's sake.*" Now the prophetic marks of the predicted antichristian apostasy given us by St. Paul, 1 Tim. chap. iv. v. 2. and 3, are first, that its authors would *speake lies in hypocrisy; having a seared conscience* (a character, as far as I am able to judge, strongly and strikingly exemplified in this writer) and secondly, that they would *forbid marriage and abstain from meats*: in conformity to the last distinguishing character of this early apostasy, this author, as I have before observed, in contradiction, not only to what St. Luke, but to what he himself elsewhere relates as our Saviour's doctrine, makes him give directions for fasting: and, on another occasion, to say that even the miraculous power of God, in curing some kind

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“ of Demoniacs, could not be efficaciously exerted
“ without prayer and *fasting* on the part of the Al-
“ mighty’s agent: and here he clearly discovers to
“ us the second of these prophetic marks, pre-
“ noticed by St. Paul, by making our Saviour ap-
“ prove of a determined unnatural abstinence from
“ marriage for *the kingdom of heaven’s sake*. These
“ were the peculiar doctrines of the Encratites or
“ Continentes, a sect which appeared very early in
“ the second century, and amongst whom it is not
“ improbable, that the same madness of superstitious
“ enthusiasm, which soon after led men into her-
“ mitages, monasteries, and even to stand for a
“ great length of time in an erect posture on the top
“ of a pillar, might have produced an instance or
“ two of the unnatural self-violence the author speaks
“ of, the very allusion to which convicts him of be-
“ ing a writer later than those instances: but it is
“ absolutely impossible that, in our Saviour’s time,
“ almost as soon as the new covenant of the king-
“ dom of heaven or of God was begun to be preach-
“ ed, and even before his disciples comprehended
“ its nature and intent, any men could have made
“ themselves eunuchs for the sake of it.”

This, surely, requires no animadversion. Be-
sides, if the Gospel of Matthew had not been written
till the doctrine of the Encratites (the founder of
which was Tatian, the disciple of Justin Martyr)
sprung up, it would have been absolutely impos-

sible that it should have been received as the production of Matthew.

7. Mr. Evanfon is displeased with the parable of the householder, Matt. 20, who gave the same wages to those who had worked only one hour, and to those who had worked all the day. "If," says he, p. 169, "by working in the vineyard is
 " meant men's performing the moral duties of the
 " gospel; and by their payment in the evening is to
 " be understood the rewards of that future life which
 " God has promised to all faithful and true Chris-
 " tians; there is not the least resemblance of any
 " kind between the circumstances of the Gospel co-
 " venant and those of the bargain made with the
 " labourers in the parable: for ever since the Gospel
 " has been preached to the world, wheresoever it
 " is known, the labourers in the Christian vineyard
 " are invited all together to enter into it; and the
 " same covenanted terms are proposed to all, with-
 " out any partial choice or predilection, viz. an eter-
 " nal life of happiness in heaven. Now in this pa-
 " rable, though the labourers who had wrought the
 " entire day, having received the bare payment they
 " had earned, had certainly no right to complain of
 " injustice in the householder, nor to control his ge-
 " nerosity towards the others in giving them more
 " than they had earned; yet surely they must feel
 " the great difference between his mere justice to
 " themselves and his extraordinary liberality to those
 " who

“ who had wrought but one hour ; and we cannot
“ wonder that they murmured at so seemingly un-
“ reasonable a preference and partiality in the distri-
“ bution of his bounty.”

But Mr. Evanston should have considered that they who had worked but one hour had been waiting with a view to being hired all the day, so that they had shewn the best disposition to labour, and only wanted opportunity.

8. An inattention to the meaning of the word which we render *everlasting* (for I cannot call it ignorance) is the ground of another most unreasonable cavi of Mr. Evanston's at the conclusion of our Lord's fine description of the proceedings of the last day. “ In the latter part of this chapter,” he says, p. 180, “ is a description of the day of judgment, “ and expressly teaches, not only that the righteous “ will then be rewarded with eternal life in heaven, “ but also, that the wicked will suffer *everlasting* “ punishment. There is such palpable injustice “ ascribed to the righteous Lord of heaven and “ earth by all those who represent him as inflicting “ infinite punishment for the definite, momentary “ offences of finite creatures, that such a doctrine “ would make me strongly suspect the authenticity “ of any scripture in which I found it ; and it is with “ great satisfaction I can remark that this doctrine is peculiar to this spurious evangelical history, and as repugnant to the positive declaration “ of the other scriptures of the New Testament as

“ it is to strict justice and the voice of reason: for
“ they assure us, that, not an endless life of torment,
“ but utter destruction and a second *death* await the
“ unreformed wicked.”

Mr. Evanston cannot well be ignorant that the word *αιωνιος*, and the corresponding term in Hebrew, are frequently used to express an indefinite long period. So he himself would understand it when it is predicated of the priesthood of Aaron, and the kingship in the family of David.

I have now discussed, and I hope with candour, every thing that Mr. Evanston has objected to the Gospel of Matthew, and if you have hitherto been at all impressed by his representations, I hope you will be satisfied that it has been without sufficient reason,

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER VIII.

Of Mr. Evanſon's Objections to the Gospel of Mark.

DEAR SIR,

MR. EVANSON has not beſtowed ſo much pains on the Gospel of Mark as he has done on that of Matthew, otherwiſe, I have no doubt but he would have found as much to object to in it; as, if, by any accident, he had happened to prefer the Gospel of Mark, he would have found as much to object to that of Luke.

1. With reſpect to this Gospel, Mr. Evanſon ſays, p. 212, "The author himſelf no where pretends to be " St. Mark; and nothing can be ſlighter or leſs ſatisfactory than the external testimony or historic evidence in its favour: as every candid inquirer will " be convinced who attentively peruſes the collection " of thoſe testimonies prefixed to the beſt editions of " this Gospel, the chief of which, reſpecting a revelation to St. Peter of Mark's having written it, " &c. are manifeſtly fabulous." Now the testimony of Mark being the writer of this Gospel is as early, and as ſtrong, as that of Luke being the author of *his*, the ſame writers always mentioning *the four Gospels* as of equal authority.

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2. As if he had been present at the time, and in the secret, Mr. Evanfon gives the following curious account of the composition of this Gospel. "It seems impossible to consider," p. 213, "the unknown author of this Gospel in any other light than as the first person who attempted to harmonize the two contradictory Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and by extracting from each what he thought the most material passages to compose of them one regular, consistent history of the public ministry of our Saviour. With this view, finding it absolutely impracticable to reconcile the two genealogies and accounts of the nativity and infancy of Jesus, like many later commentators, when they find themselves unable to elucidate the text, he has entirely omitted those parts of the two histories; and begins where the original writing of St. Luke certainly began, with the preaching and baptism of John. For the same reason, as it is impossible to make the conclusions of those two Gospels harmonize together, this compiler abruptly broke off his history at the eighth verse of the last chapter; and the twelve following verses, which are compiled partly from Luke and Matthew and still more from the Gospel attributed to St. John, not being found in the oldest and best copies of this work, are undoubtedly the addition of some still later hand, who has betrayed himself, by inadvertently making his addition expressly contradict the author whom he personated."

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To this it is only necessary to say, that such another harmonizer and abridger as Mr. Evanfon makes Mark to be of the other Gospels, we shall not easily find; and that on equally plausible ground, he might have made Matthew the harmonizer and abridger of Mark, Luke, and John, and Luke the harmonizer and abridger of John, Matthew, and Mark.

3. As Mr. Evanfon censures Matthew for making the sign of the prophet Jonah to be different from that of Luke, he censures Mark for contradicting them both. "In the eighth chapter, ver. 12," p. 217, "the author, unable to reconcile his mind "to what the pretended Matthew has said of the sign "of the prophet Jonas, though he was actually copying from him, has thought proper flatly to contradict both him and St. Luke, and to make our "Saviour declare, that no sign at all should be given "to that generation."

What an unreasonable and obstinate man must this Mark, or whoever he was, have been, to have both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke before him, to copy after, and yet, though he had no knowledge of his own, choose to follow neither of them. He must have known, too, that his blunder would be exposed by the first person who would take the trouble to compare them. A very little candour, however, might have led Mr. Evanfon to see that by *no sign at all*, this writer meant *no such sign* as the Pharisees required, viz. a sign from heaven.

4. A very great proportion of what Mr. Evanfon
objects

objects to the Gospel of Mark relates to his representing Jesus as having seemed to use some natural means of cure, when he worked some of his miracles of a beneficent nature. "In the sixth chapter, verse 13, this writer," p. 215, "tells us, without the least warrant from his originals Luke and Matthew, that when our Lord sent out the twelve Apostles with miraculous power to cure diseases, they anointed the sick they healed with oil. Now since the very intent of these miraculous cures was to convince the Jews who beheld them, in a way peculiarly adapted to the kind, benevolent genius of the gospel, of the supernatural interposition of the Deity in favour of the new religion they announced; every application, though of the most simple kind, must necessarily tend to counteract the belief of the miracle, and afford ground for suspicion, that the cure was effected by some medicinal virtue of the oil they used, not by the immediate power of God; and, therefore, as no such application is ever said to have been used by our Saviour or any of his disciples in either of St. Luke's histories, it is in the highest degree improbable that any such unction was ever used by them; and the very mention of such a circumstance in this Gospel and in the Epistle attributed to St. James, affords a very strong presumptive proof that neither of the writers lived in the apostolic age; but that they both wrote in the second century, when the preachers of christianity no longer having the mi-
"raculous

“ raculous gift of healing, yet pretending to possess it,
“ conscious that no effect would be produced upon
“ the patient by their word or touch, introduced the
“ formal ceremony of anointing with oil, accompa-
“ nied by the united prayer of the Presbytery; and
“ if, as, no doubt, sometimes happened, the sick per-
“ son recovered, the cure was attributed to the mi-
“ raculous efficacy of the pious, greasy ritual, which,
“ that it might not be deemed, in any case, absolutely
“ ineffectual, whenever the patient died, was transfer-
“ red to the next world, to secure his eternal salvation
“ there; for which purpose alone, under the title of
“ *extreme unction*, it is still used by the most perfectly
“ and most consistently orthodox Church in Chris-
“ tendom. The seventh chapter, ver. 33, contains an
“ account of our Lord’s curing a deaf and dumb per-
“ son, with such ridiculous gesticulations as are very
“ unworthy the character of the messenger of almighty
“ God, putting his fingers into his ears, and touching
“ his tongue with his spittle.” He adds, p. 217,
“ At the twenty-third verse, this writer again repre-
“ sents our Saviour, with the airs of a mountebank,
“ applying his spittle to the eyes of a blind man in
“ order to give him sight; and as if one interpo-
“ sition of *Almighty* power were not sufficient to ac-
“ complish a perfect cure, the man’s sight is not
“ completely acquired till he has applied his hands a
“ second time to his eyes.”

If Mr. Evanston can suppose the Gospel of Mark,
and the epistle of James, to have been written in an
age in which he can prove that Christians had adopt-
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ed the superstitious practice of anointing with oil, when, being conscious that no effect would be produced by it in this life, they thought it might secure eternal salvation in the next, it will be much later than he seems to imagine, long after the certain existence of both these books. But if he had attended to the accounts of other miracles recorded in the scriptures, the authenticity of which, I presume, he will not deny, he would have found nothing particular to object to in those of Mark.

Did not Moses strike the rock before the water gushed out, though this action might have suggested the idea of the water having previously filled some channel or reservoir, naturally contained in the mountain, and that nothing was wanting but to remove a slight obstruction to its running out? Did he not throw a branch of a tree into the fountain of bitter waters at Mara, in order to make them fit for drinking? Did not Elisha order Naaman to wash seven times in the river Jordan in order to be cured of his leprosy? And did not Elijah stretch himself upon the dead child, as if he might bring him to life by communicating warmth to it?

But suppose our Saviour really meant to give the blind man an idea that he did not cure him by a miracle, but by some medicinal effect of the ointment, what serious objection could be made to his conduct? All that could be said would be that, in this case, he chose to exert his benevolence without wishing to have it known at the time, that the miracle had any other use, his other public miracles being abundantly

abundantly sufficient to establish his divine mission.

5. Mr. Evanfon has two other objections to this Gospel of Mark on the subject of prophecy. "The
" only prophecies," p. 218, "that I have observed
" peculiar to this Gospel attributed to St. Mark, are,
" first, ch. x. ver. 30, where he makes our Lord pre-
" dict, that whosoever hath forsaken houses, lands or
" friends, for his sake and the Gospel's, *shall receive*
" not only *eternal life in the world to come*, but *now in*
" *this time* the very same articles multiplied an *hun-*
" *dred fold, with persecution*. As persecution can be
" exerted only upon a person's property, liberty, or
" life, it seems inconceivable how possessions of any
" kind should be so greatly multiplied in a state of
" persecution; and the very terms of the prediction
" appear to imply in them a manifest contradiction:
" but howsoever they may be interpreted, the whole
" history of religious persecution, from the illustrious
" messenger of the new covenant to the present hour,
" proves the prophecy to be absolutely false, and the
" writer of it altogether unworthy of credit.

" The second is the prediction respecting St. Pe-
" ter's denying his Master, c. xiv. ver. 30, where, in
" direct contradiction to both the writings he had be-
" fore him, he makes our Lord tell him, that before
" the cock should crow *twice*, he would thrice deny
" him. Accordingly, ver. 68—72, he says, *the cock*
" *crew* as soon as Peter had once denied him, and
" after he had repeated his denial twice more, with
" oaths and curses very unbecoming a chosen disci-
" ple

“ple of Jesus Christ, the cock crew a second time.
 “This relation is so absolutely irreconcilable with
 “what is given us in the Gospel according to St.
 “Matthew, and *that* with the circumstances of the
 “same event recorded by St. Luke, that two out of
 “the three must inevitably be false: and which those
 “are, the judicious reader will decide as he thinks fit.”

A person used to the figurative language of scripture, and especially that of our Saviour, might have spared himself the former of these remarks, by supposing that, the literal sense being impossible, some other must have been intended; and it is not very unnatural to suppose that, instead of the actual possession of houses and lands, the christian deprived of them by persecution would have more than an equivalent satisfaction of another kind; or he might have supposed a very few words to have been inserted by an error of the transcriber. I wonder that the sagacity of Mr. Evanston did not find another, and much stronger objection to this passage, viz. that a man who had lost one *mother* by persecution, should be rewarded with two or more, and one antient version has *fathers* as well as mothers. On this topic Mr. Evanston might have displayed as much ingenious sarcasm as on any other, on which he has with so much seeming satisfaction enlarged the most. I wonder that he omitted the opportunity. The slight difference about the *cock crowing* needs no answer; at least it cannot be said, that the account which supposes *two* cock crowings was an *abridgment* of that which made only *one*.

Upon the whole there is so little that Mr. Evan-son objects to the Gospel of Mark, that, the external evidence being the same for both, I do not see why he might not have made this his only genuine Gospel, and have thrown that of Luke into the class of apocryphal ones. The passages he objects to in Luke he supposes to be interpolations, and those in Mark to be the composition of the writer. But this is perfectly arbitrary. He might just as well have ridiculed Luke for the absurdities he finds in his Gospel, and have supposed the few things he objects to in Mark to have been interpolations. That the Gospel of Luke is written in a better style and manner, is with me far from being any evidence of its not being a later fabrication, by a person more used to composition.

I am, &c.

L E T T E R IX.

Of Mr. Evanston's Objections to the Gospel of John.

DEAR SIR,

MR. EVANSTON finds much more to object to the Gospel of John than to that of Mark, nor do I wonder at it. There are many striking peculiarities in his Gospel. But all that can be justly inferred from this circumstance is, that he is an original writer, and did not copy from any other, though antiquity says that he had seen the works of the other evangelists. On this account he has not many things in common with them, and when he does go over the same part of the history, he appears to me to have done it for the sake of greater exactness. For in all those cases he is remarkably circumstantial; as in his account of the feeding of the four thousand, and of Peter denying his master. These parts, as well as every other in his Gospel, bear more internal unequivocal marks of being written by an eye-witness, than any other writings whatever, sacred or profane. His view seems to have been, without directly saying that the other Gospels were not sufficiently exact, to relate the story in a more correct manner. But this is no impeachment of the veracity,

veracity, or general good information, of the other evangelists.

It is evident also that the Gospel of John was not composed as one continued or complete work ; and it is probable that it was written at different times, and through the inattention of the writer, or his friends, who might assist in putting the parts of it together, they are not always properly arranged, the fifth chapter, as Mr. Mann has shewn, being evidently out of its proper place. The last chapter may be considered as a kind of supplement, added after the rest of the work had been formally concluded in the preceding chapter. Critics have also discovered some interpolations in this Gospel, but they are pretty easily distinguished. These things, however, by no means affect the authenticity of the work in general, which was received by all the primitive Christians as unquestionably the writing of the apostle.

1. Mr. Evanfon objects to the style of this Gospel as remarkably different from that of the Revelation. It is not, however, more different from it than the style of some of the epistles of Paul is from that of others ; and the same persons, in different circumstances, and on different subjects, write in a very different manner. Besides, the apostles not being native Greeks, might be assisted in the composition of their writings, and by different persons at different times.

As there is an uniform tradition in favour of the apostle John being the author of the Gospel, and of

the first of the epistles that bear his name (and the style of them is remarkably similar), the different style of the Revelation has been alledged as an argument to prove that this book was not written by him, but by another John. Mr. Evanfon, indeed, says, p. 219, that "the apostle John is the avowed "author of the book of the Apocalypse." But this is so far from being the case, that because the author of this book does not call himself an apostle, but only John, it has by many been ascribed to the other John. That Mr. Evanfon should be guilty of this great oversight, considering the attention he has given to this book, is not a little extraordinary.

2. "The author of this Gospel," says Mr. Evanfon, p. 222, "it must be evident to every competent unprejudiced judge, who reads it in the "original, particularly the exordium, was well "acquainted with the writings of Plato." He also says, p. 234, "The supposed John begins by representing him" (Jesus) "as the divine logos of "Plato, under a human form, dwelling among men," (which by the way is very remote from any thing in Platonism) "and repeatedly represents him as "omniscient." He therefore says, p. 205, "I am "perfectly convinced that this Gospel was not written earlier than the second century, and that it is "the patch-work composition of some convert from "the Pagan schools."

Now this supposed deep knowledge of Platonism rests on the slightest foundation. For the term

logos

logos by no means necessarily means the *logos* of Plato, but is most probably that of the scriptures of the Old Testament, meaning that *logos*, or *word of God*, by which, according to Moses and the Psalmist, *all things were made*, and with which no Jew could be unacquainted. And if it was the same *logos* that was in Christ, and acted by him, it might be said to *dwell* in him; and being the power of God himself, could not but be both omnipotent, and omniscient, though the latter attribute is not particularly mentioned by this writer. It is possible, however, that the apostle John might have heard of the *logos* of Plato, as well as of that of the Gnostics, and might intend, in opposition to them, to speak of the true *logos*, viz. that of the scriptures. But this is not incompatible with the age, or the circumstances, of the apostle John.

3. Mr. Evanston finds the greatest contradiction between the Gospel of John and that of Luke, and even those of Matthew and Mark, in his representing Jesus as making disciples before John was cast into prison, and the disciples baptizing for him at that time. "Such gross contradiction," he says, p. 227, "ought to convince the most orthodox, that there must be falsehood on one side or the other, if not on both; and that, therefore, common sense and reason require them, *at least*, to reject as false and spurious, either this Gospel attributed to St. John, or both the Gospels attributed to the other two." But all that can fairly be inferred from this difference is, as has been observed by the

earliest writers, either that John was better acquainted with the circumstances of the early history of Jesus than the other evangelists, or, that they having omitted the mention of them, he thought proper to relate them.

4. Mr. Evanſon lays great ſtreſs on the difference between Matthew and John with reſpect to John the Baptiſt knowing Jeſus, or not knowing him, previous to his baptizing him. “Let us “bring the whole,” he ſays, p. 221, “to the propoſed teſt; obſerving, by the way, a groſs contradiction between this writer and the pretended “Matthew, at the very outſet: for ch. i. ver. 32, he “tells us, that John the Baptiſt declared he did not “know Jeſus to be the deſtined Meſſiah, till he ſaw “the holy ſpirit deſcending on him; whereas the “Gospel of St. Matthew, c. iii. v. 14, informs us “that he knew him as ſoon as he came to him; and, “at firſt, reſuſed to baptize him, “ſaying, I have “need to be baptized of thee, and comeſt thou “to me?” Yet ſtill the orthodox receive both “theſe Gospels for the genuine works of apoſtles, “and believe both theſe contradictory aſſertions “to be truth, and even the inſpired word of “God!!!”

What the orthodox believe about inſpiration is no concern of mine, or of Mr. Evanſon's. He might juſt as well have taken this opportunity of exclaiming againſt the doctrine of tranſubſtantiation. All that I have to obſerve is, that two original writers might differ as much as theſe, without giving any juſt

just grounds for arraigning the authenticity of the works of either of them. I prefer the account of John, who I believe had seen that of Matthew, and, as having been a disciple of the Baptist, he had a better opportunity of being acquainted with the real circumstances of the transaction.

5. There is another difference between the Gospel of John and that of Luke, on which Mr. Evan-son likewise lays great stress. It relates to the call of Peter, and some other disciples to follow Jesus. In my opinion the two different accounts may, without much difficulty, be reconciled. Nothing, however, would follow from the difference being irreconcilable, but that one of them (and the probability will be in favour of John) was better informed concerning the early part of the history of Jesus than the other; and the narrative of John is remarkably circumstantial in this case.

But it is by no means certain that all the twelve apostles always accompanied Jesus before their appointment to that office. As it is then only said that *they might be with him*, it is probable that before this time they had not always been with him. Peter therefore might have become a disciple of Jesus in Judea, as John says he did, but, returning to his occupation, might have a second and more particular call at the sea of Galilee afterwards.

6. Mr. Evan-son, making the greatest account of prophecy, is much offended at the Gospel of John as not containing any, though he did not think the bet-

ter of those of Matthew or Mark for having as much of this internal evidence as that of Luke. "As to
 " what," he says, p. 24, "is the grand internal
 " testimony of authenticity, indispensably necessary
 " in every scripture, which contains the history of
 " a supernatural revelation, predictions of future
 " events verified by their actual completion, after
 " all that we have already seen of this writer, to
 " find such evidence in his work, peculiar to him-
 " self, would be as unaccountable and wonderful as
 " any of the extraordinary miracles with which he
 " has endeavoured to astonish the ignorant cre-
 " dulity of the second century: but though, with
 " a degree of circumstantial minuteness, which no
 " writer of credit would have pretended to, he has
 " reported with verbal exactness the discourses not
 " of Jesus only, but of John the Baptist also, to his
 " particular disciples, at the distance of, at least,
 " thirty-six years after they were uttered, and some
 " of them of very considerable length; he has not
 " thought fit to introduce any thing which can with
 " propriety be deemed a prophecy."

But is it necessary that every true history, or every canonical book of scripture, should contain a prophecy? What prophecy of consequence is there in the Acts of the Apostles? John, having seen the other Gospels, had no occasion to repeat the prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. Mr. Evanston, instead of being impressed with the circumstantial minuteness of the narrative of John re-
 specting

specting the Baptist (which, if it had occurred in Luke, would have been decisive with him in favour of his having been present at the transactions) notices it here as a certain mark of imposture; no person in his opinion being able to retain so many particulars in memory. But surely the circumstances of a thing of such great importance as the preaching of the Baptist, whose disciple this apostle had been, and which it is probable he had, in the course of his preaching, related a thousand times, would never be lost from his recollection.

7. Mr. Evanston, however, acknowledges one prophecy in the Gospel of John, but he cavils at it on account of the enigmatical manner in which it is expressed, though all the prophecies in his favourite book of *Revelation* are delivered in as figurative and enigmatical a manner. Because Jesus said, *Destroy this temple, meaning his body, and in three days I will raise it up*, Mr. Evanston says, p. 250, "it makes our Lord assure them, that though dead, he could raise himself up, whereas all the other apostles, and even John himself (for he was in company with, and therefore agreed with Peter, Acts iii. 5) unanimously asserted, that it was not himself, but God who raised him from the dead."

But though, the better to conceal his meaning, Jesus said that if the temple was destroyed *he* would raise it again, he evidently only meant that it *would* be raised again, and by that power by which all his miraculous works (which to appearance proceeded
from

from himself) were really performed. He was in no danger of being understood to say that a dead man could do any thing, and much less raise himself to life. Whoever the author of this Gospel was, it is plain that he fully understood this to be the meaning of the expression.

8. Mr. Evanfon equally cavils at what Jesus is represented by John as saying concerning the privileges of those who should believe and obey his Gospel, in not being subject to death. "In chapter viii. ver. 51, our Lord is represented as saying, "verily, verily, if a man keep my saying he shall never see death," or as it is repeated in the next verse, "shall never taste of death," and again "c. xi. v. 25 and 26, he not only says "he who believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, but also, whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." What meaning could the writer have in such absurd and groundless predictions as these? St. Paul, as well as daily experience, assures us, that *in Adam*, in our human nature, *all men die*, and we know that our Lord himself, his apostles, and all his most faithful disciples, died, or, in the words of the author, *have seen or tasted of death*; and if we should suppose, that he only intended to insinuate that, on account of the certainty of the resurrection of his disciples, their natural death was not to be accounted dying; yet still, according to this author himself, the quibble would hold as truly of the most profligate unbeliever

"believer

“believer as of those who believed on him; for, “c. v. ver. 28 and 29, he says, “the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear “the voice of the Son of God, and shall come “forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto “the resurrection of damnation.”

When what a person says cannot be literally true, it is candid (as no man writes without some meaning) to suppose that he speaks figuratively. And Mr. Evanston certainly knew that by *never dying* some interpreters suppose our Lord meant *not dying for ever*, and others that in this expression he referred to the case of those who will be found alive at his second coming, of whom Paul says, that they shall *not die*, but *be changed*. Had the expression occurred in Luke, Mr. Evanston would have found no difficulty at all in it; or if he had, he would have supposed it to be an interpolation, and not to affect the authenticity of the work in general.

9. In another passage also Mr. Evanston cavils at the manner in which, according to this evangelist, our Saviour chose to express himself, when his real meaning, interpreted by the analogy of scripture language, was sufficiently clear. When, after our Lord's resurrection, he is represented as *breathing on his apostles*, as an emblem of their receiving the Holy Spirit, or *breath*, “he, at the same time,” p. 239, “O impious falsehood! gave them power to “remit or retain any person's sins.” On this subject he
expatiates

expatiates more at large, p. 209. " The very nature of the Gospel covenant, as well as the whole history of Peter and the other apostles, shews us, that neither he nor any of them had the power of forgiving or retaining sins; and that neither the whole college of apostles, nor even Jesus Christ himself, ever have been or will be able (if it were possible to suppose them willing) to admit one vicious, unreformed person into, nor to exclude one virtuous benevolent man out of *the kingdom of heaven*. Indeed the whole conversation, of which this prophecy makes a part, is so exceedingly different from that which St. Luke tells us our Saviour held on the same occasion, that it cannot be entitled to any degree of credit, except with those who think fit rather to reject the Gospel of St. Luke."

Now what is there to shock Mr. Evanfon so much in this? Did not Jesus pronounce the sins of the paralytic person, whom he healed at Capernaum, to be forgiven, even according to his favourite evangelist Luke? ch. v. 20. And whatever be meant by the expression, Mr. Evanfon will not deny but that it was as impious in Jesus as in the apostles, since he considers him as equally a human being, having no powers but what he received from God. Also whatever power Jesus had, he transferred it to the apostles. With Mr. Evanfon, therefore, I have no occasion to enter any farther into the explanation of our Lord's meaning in this language, whether it
signified

signified the cure of diseases, or distinguishing the characters of men.

10. With as little reason Mr. Evanfon is offended at the language of our Saviour to the woman of Samaria. "In chapter iv. 21 (p. 251), the author makes our Saviour say to the Samaritan woman, "believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." Had the words been, that, under the new covenant, God should no longer be worshipped there with sacrifices and oblations, they would have been true, and of the same import with many other passages both of the old and new testament; but in the indefinite sense in which they are here used, nothing can be falser: "for Christianity teaches men to worship God both at Jerusalem and Samaria, and in every place upon the globe."

Could Mr. Evanfon really think that the writer of this book, whoever he was, meant to represent our Saviour as saying the time would come when God would not be worshipped at all, neither at Jerusalem, nor yet on mount Gerizim? No writer could entertain so absurd an idea. Mr. Evanfon, therefore, must have known that the words had some other meaning. And what is more natural than to suppose that, since the question between Jesus and the woman was about the one place in which God would be worshipped, in preference to all others, under the old dispensation, such as Jerusalem

lem had been, that in the gospel dispensation there would be *no such place* for all true worshippers, neither at Jerusalem, nor in Samaria. That God will never be worshipped with sacrifices and oblations under the new covenant, which Mr. Evanfon here says "would be true," was evidently not true; for in that manner did both Jesus himself and the apostles after him worship, and so, I doubt not, will the Jews once more, when converted to Christianity, after their return to their own country, and the rebuilding of the temple.

11. Mr. Evanfon thinks it extraordinary that Nathanael should be mentioned as our Lord's sixth disciple, p. 224, and be declared to be *a man without guile*, and yet never be mentioned by himself, or any other writer, afterwards. But Mr. Evanfon should have observed, that the antients, as well as moderns, supposed that *Nathanael* was the same with *Bartholomew*, one of the twelve apostles. Had John given a list of the apostles, the name of Nathanael might have appeared among them. Mr. Evanfon might have made the same objection to the Gospel of Luke, who speaks of the call of *Levi*, and the feast that he made for Jesus, ch. v. 27, without ever making any farther mention of him. For in his enumeration of the names of the twelve apostles, ch. vi. 15, we find that of Matthew, but no Levi.

Mr. Evanfon is no less offended at Lazarus, the intimate friend of Jesus, not constantly following him. "Our Lord repeatedly declared," p. 246, "that
" no

“no man was worthy of him, or could be his disciple, who did not forsake family, friends, and all he had for his sake and the Gospel’s; yet, according to this history, Lazarus, his dearly beloved friend, never forsook his family and abode at Bethany, to accompany him like his apostles; nor is he said, even by this only writer who mentions him, to have ever taken an active part in the promulgation of that new covenant to mankind, to establish which, was the sole object of our Lord’s life, death, and resurrection from the dead; and which, during his whole public ministry, seemed alone to occupy his thoughts and attention.” But surely Mr. Evanston must know that few besides the twelve apostles constantly accompanied Jesus. He could, therefore, only mean that no man could be worthy of being his disciple who was not *ready* to leave all and follow him, if it should be required of him so to do.

12. Disposed as Mr. Evanston was to cavil at every thing in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, not contained in that of Luke, we cannot wonder at his censure of the miracle of changing water into wine. But that he should exaggerate as he does every circumstance that has the appearance of improbability, and treat with so much levity and contempt what others regard with reverence, is something more than I should have expected of him, or of any Christian. I shall, however, quote all that he says about it. “The first mira-

“cle,”

“ cle,” p. 240, “ he has related, and which he
“ calls the beginning of the miracles of Jesus, is the
“ changing the water into wine at a marriage feast,
“ when the inviter’s stock of wine grew low; though
“ the story itself informs us that the guests had al-
“ ready drunk so *well*, that the master of the feast
“ judged it more probable, that if any more wine
“ had been brought them, it would have been of an
“ inferior quality to what they had been drinking;
“ but this miraculous wine was of so superior and
“ excellent a flavour, that it must necessarily re-ex-
“ cite even the sated appetite, and tempt them to
“ continue their intemperance with a fresh relish.
“ That this writer, and many another orthodox
“ preacher of what is called Christianity, had he
“ been endowed with sufficient power, would have
“ performed and gladly partaken of the intemperate
“ joys of so wonderfully seasonable a transmutation,
“ I can easily suppose, and think it not improbable
“ that he would also have exerted his supernatural
“ ability to the enriching himself and his poor dis-
“ ciples, by transmuting the cheap and baser metals
“ into gold, and to the enjoyment of many other
“ instances of sensual indulgence equally laudable
“ and equally christian as the intemperate use of
“ strong liquor: but whosoever rightly apprehends
“ the character and doctrine of the holy Mediator of
“ the new covenant; and has observed how utterly
“ incompatible every degree of sensual excess is with
“ the Gospel precepts of sobriety, temperance, mo-
“ deration,

deration, and the subjection of our bodily appetites to reason and religious duty, will find such a miracle as this incredible, though it had been recorded in all the four histories; and coming in so very exceptionable a form, upon the single, unsupported testimony of so very exceptionable an historian, it is altogether as unworthy of belief as the fabulous Roman Catholic legend of St. Nicholas's chickens, of later times. To St. Luke's credit, he is so far from giving it the least confirmation, that though he informs us our Lord, from motives of compassion for a large multitude who had followed him to such a distance from their own homes and stayed to hear him so late, that they could not otherwise have been provided with necessary sustenance, miraculously fed five thousand persons with only five loaves and two fishes; yet he does not tell us of his changing so much as one firkin of water into wine on that charitable occasion, though, here, he is said to transmute eighteen firkins for the use of these jovial toppers of Cana."

Had this story been found in Luke, and Mr. Evanson should not have thought it an interpolation, all that he would have inferred from it, would have been that our Saviour was no enemy to innocent exhilaration on a natural occasion of joy; and that there was a propriety in his supplying a want, of which himself and his attendants, probably more than had been expected, had been the occasion, in

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a family

a family that perhaps could but ill afford it. So differently may the same thing be represented, according to the state of mind with which it is considered.

13. Mr. Evanfon finds much improbability in John's account of our Saviour's intercourse with the woman of Samaria, whom he calls, p. 228, "a libidinous woman;" as at her saying *the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans*, though his disciples were then gone to buy food in a city of the Samaritans; that to her, and, as he says, "in a strain of fictitious jargon," he announced himself to be the Messiah, though not to the Jews; that he should say that it then wanted *four months* of being the time of harvest, which, he says, is inconsistent with the history; and that it could not with truth be said that *other men laboured and the apostles entered into their labours*; and he concludes with saying, p. 231, "Surely a writer so little consistent with the best confirmed truth, and with common sense, is very unjustly accounted an apostle of Jesus Christ."

That there are considerable difficulties attending the circumstances of this story I readily acknowledge, and therefore I am sometimes inclined to think that, like some other parts of this Gospel, it has been misplaced. But the improbabilities are by no means so great as Mr. Evanfon represents them. The greatest difficulty respects Jesus owning himself to be the Messiah, though it appears to have been to this woman only. For what is not a little extraordinary, the people of the town do not appear to

have learned it of her, but to have inferred it, as our Lord's hearers in general did, from his discourses and his works.

The *dealings* the woman refers to need not be supposed to be of a mercantile nature, but only acts of friendship; and the four months to the harvest expresses not the distance from that time of the next harvest, but the usual interval between the seed time and harvest. And there was a great propriety in this application of such a proverbial expression, since the natural harvest followed the seed time at the distance of four months; whereas his spiritual harvest came immediately after the seed time.

As to the character of this woman, which, to heighten the improbability of the story, Mr. Evanston makes the worst of, Bishop Pearce supposes it not to have been what our common copies and translations intimate, viz. that of a woman living an openly licentious life, but that, though she had had four husbands, she had not at that time any husband; and the respect which her townsmen seem to have had for her certainly favours this supposition.

14. By an easy conjecture of Bp. Pearce, the justness of which I think I have in a manner demonstrated, viz. that the word *passover* in John iv. ver. 4. is an interpolation, all the following censure may be obviated. "In the fifth chapter," p. 231, "the author tells us, "that after the cure of the nobleman's son at Capernaum, which, he says, was the second of our Sa-

"viour's miracles in Galilee, he went again to Jeru-
 "salem to a feast of the Jews; but does not say what
 "feast. According to his own description of the
 "time of our Lord's return to Galilee, that it was
 "four months before harvest, it ought to be another
 "feast of the Passover, unless we suppose him to have
 "transgressed the injunction of the Mosaic Law. If
 "this writer, therefore, were a Jew, or well versed in
 "the customs and ordinances of the Jews, he must
 "mean that this was a second Passover, at which our
 "Saviour attended, after the commencement of his
 "public ministry; yet after his return again into Ga-
 "lilee from this feast, in the very next chapter we
 "are told that he crossed the sea of Galilee, and
 "that "the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh."
 "Surely this writer is the most extraordinary chro-
 "nologist and historiographer that ever appeared in
 "the world!"

That the word *passover* was not to be found in
 this place in the time of Irenæus, is certain. For he
 expressly enumerates all the passovers that he could
 find distinctly mentioned, or alluded to, in the Gospels,
 with a view to make them as many as he could; and
 to help his argument he supposes some feasts to have
 been passovers which certainly were not so, and yet
 he makes no mention of this.

15. Without seeming to know that some of the
 verses in John's account of the cure of the impotent
 man at the pool of Bethesda are an interpolation,
 which

which he might have seen in Griesbach, Mr. Evan-
son makes the following remarks, worthy only of an
unbeliever. "In the fifth chapter," p. 242, "our
"author relates the miraculous cure of a poor,
"friendless, impotent man. So far all is credible.
"But unfortunately he tells us, this man had been
"long waiting to obtain his cure from the miraculous
"efficacy of the pool of Bethesda, whose waters be-
"ing disturbed at certain seasons, by an Angel, who
"descended for that purpose, acquired for a moment
"the wonderful virtue of healing every kind of sick-
"ness or disease; but lost it again so instantaneously,
"that none but the single patient who got first into
"the pool after the troubling of the water could re-
"ceive the least benefit from it. In contradiction,
"therefore, to the whole tenour of the Jewish history,
"from whence we learn, that there was no prophet
"nor any supernatural interposition of divine provi-
"dence amongst the Jews, from the time of their last
"return from Babylon to the coming of Jesus Christ,
"this writer informs us of a standing miracle amongst
"them notoriously and frequently repeated in the
"sheep-market, that is, in one of the most public
"places in Jerusalem. Had this been true, it could
"never have escaped the notice of either Jew or
"Roman resident in that metropolis; but must have
"been often spoken of by every historian, who gave
"an account of that city: yet no such circumstance
"is so much as once hinted at by Luke, Josephus,
"nor any of the Roman historians."

But supposing the part of the story which relates to the virtues of the pool not to have been an interpolation, but that the writer had taken it for granted that the virtues ascribed to it were real, how does this affect his character? He might have been credulous, in this respect, and yet his history not the less authentic.

16. Mr. Evanston finds a number of contradictions of his only Gospel of Luke in the circumstances attending our Lord's last passover, and those of his trial, which he enlarges upon in his usual sarcastic way. "The last named writer," p. 236, "we have seen, informs us, that the last supper our Saviour eat with his apostles was the Paschal supper, which he told them he had been particularly desirous to eat with them; that at that supper, after instituting the communion of bread and wine, as a rite to be observed by his disciples merely in grateful remembrance of him, he declared that one of them would betray him; but did not explain who it was. This author, on the contrary, tells us that the last supper he eat with them was *before the feast of the passover*; and, instead of the institution of the Lord's supper, represents our Saviour as suddenly, *after supper was ended*, adopting the very unnecessary, useless and unbecoming ceremony of washing his apostles' feet, a species of extraordinary, unmeaning humiliation, which none of them ever imitated; that, after this ceremony, he told them one of them would betray him; and intimated to one apostle, his favourite

" favourite above the rest, that it was Judas Iscariot
 " by giving him a sop, though supper was already
 " over. From hence to his being led to Pilate's
 " judgment hall, this author's narration differs very
 " greatly from that of St. Luke; and there it flatly
 " contradicts him. For persisting to say that it was
 " the preparation for the passover, though, St. Luke
 " assures us the preceding day was the day on which it
 " was necessary to kill the Paschal lamb; and that our
 " Saviour accordingly then eat it with his apostles;
 " the author tells us, that the rulers of the Jews them-
 " selves did not go into the judgment hall, for fear
 " they should be defiled so as to be prevented eating
 " the passover; and that, for that reason, the Roman
 " Governor, with an amazing degree of condescen-
 " sion, went out and in from his judgment seat to
 " them, and from them to the judgment seat several
 " times. St. Luke, however, in terms as diametri-
 " cally opposite as truth to falsehood, affirms that the
 " chief Priests and Elders of the Jews were present at
 " Pilate's examination of our Saviour, and urged the
 " only accusation against him; and tells us that after
 " Herod had sent him back to him, Pilate assem-
 " bled the rulers and people of the Jews, and " said
 " unto them, ye have brought this man unto me, as
 " one that perverteth the people; and behold I hav-
 " ing examined him *before you* have found no fault in
 " him." When Pilate had consented to gratify them
 " by his crucifixion, this writer says that Jesus him-
 " self bare his own cross to the place where he was

“ crucified: St. Luke that the Jews compelled one
“ Simon a Cyrenian to bear the cross after Jesus. St.
“ Luke tells us, that after our Lord’s death, Joseph
“ of Arimathea took the body and laid it in a new
“ sepulchre; that the women were present and saw
“ how and where it was laid; and went and prepared
“ spices and ointments to embalm it with, as soon as
“ the sabbath was ended. This writer, on the con-
“ trary, informs us, that Joseph and Nicodemus to-
“ gether embalmed the body with an hundred pound
“ weight of myrrh and aloes and other spices “ as the
“ manner of the Jews is to bury;” and then laid it in
“ the sepulchre. St. Luke assures us that in the
“ evening after our Lord’s resurrection, that is, in the
“ beginning of the second day of the week, he ap-
“ peared to all the *eleven* apostles and other disciples,
“ who were assembled together with them; and from
“ that time to his ascension was frequently seen by them
“ at Jerusalem; that he then explained to them the
“ meaning of the prophecies concerning himself, in-
“ structed them in the nature and purport of the
“ gospel, and bid them tarry at Jerusalem till the day
“ of Pentecost, when they were to receive the holy
“ Ghost or holy inspiration; that they did so, and
“ never returned again to dwell in their own country
“ Galilee. The pretended John, in contradiction to
“ all this, tells us, that the evening on which the dis-
“ ciples saw our Saviour was the first day of the week,
“ which shews that he was no Jew, but one who
“ reckoned his time like the Greeks and Romans;
“ that

“ that all the eleven apostles were not present; for
“ that Thomas was not with them, and did not see
“ him till eight days after; that instead of telling
“ them to wait till Pentecost for the gift of the holy
“ inspiration, he then “ breathed on them and said,
“ receive ye the holy Ghost.”

Now, whatever inconsistency there may be in these respects between John and Luke, nothing can be inferred from it, but that one of them was better informed than the other; and the probability will be that John, who was present, is the more exact of the two. The difficulty about the *preparation of the passover*, I think I have sufficiently explained in the *Dissertations prefixed to my Harmony of the Gospels*, where I shewed, p. 111, that it must mean that preparation for the sabbath which fell in the paschal week.

The washing of the apostles' feet, though ridiculed by Mr. Evanfon, appears to me not at all improbable, and a very instructive action; and not being intended to be imitated literally, I am not surpris'd that we find no mention of the disciples doing it after him. The words *before you* in Luke need not to be understood literally, as every thing that had passed was immediately reported to them; so that they knew it as well as if they had been themselves present. And Jesus might begin to carry the cross, but appearing to be unable to do it, it might have been given to another person. What was done to the body of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea might not be known
to

to the women, or they might choose to make some addition to it. Luke might not know but that Thomas was present the first time that Jesus appeared to the apostles, or *eleven* being their number after the defection of Judas, as *twelve* had been before, the phrase might be used by him though one of them was then absent. The other differences in the accounts have been more or less noticed before.

Upon the whole, I see nothing in these remarks of Mr. Evanston but a determination to undervalue the Gospel of John, as he had done those of Matthew and Mark; but without any more specious ground for it; and with the same predilection for any of these three, he might, with as much plausibility, have cried down the Gospel of Luke.

Such are the reasons for which Mr. Evanston has been led to reject, as he says, p. 255, "three of the
"four generally received Gospels as spurious fictions
"of the second century, unnecessary, and even pre-
"judicial to true Christianity, and in every respect
"unworthy of the regard which so many ages have
"paid them." And such are the reasons which lead me to adhere to the hitherto universally received opinion on the subject. Compare them, and judge for yourself.

I am, &c,

LETTER

LETTER X.

Of Mr. Evanſon's Objections to the Epistle to the Romans.

DEAR SIR,

MR. Evanſon, not content with rejecting three of the four Gospels, has been led, as he ſays, p. 255, “ by the ſame train of inveſtigation to reject ſeveral “ of the canonical epiſtles, upon the ſole authority “ of ſome of which ſeveral fundamental doctrines “ of the orthodox church, of various ſects of pro- “ feſſing Chriſtians, are confidently taught the peo- “ ple for doctrines of the goſpel of Chriſt.” “ I there- “ fore,” he ſays, p. 256, “ think it my duty to add “ briefly my reaſons for expunging alſo out of the “ volume of duly authenticated ſcriptures of the “ *New Covenant*, the Epiſtles, to the Romans—to “ the Ephesians—to the Coloſſians—to the Hebrews “ —of James—of Peter—of John—of Jude,—and, “ in the book of the Revelation, the Epiſtles to the “ ſeven churches of Aſia.” He alſo ſays, p. 284, “ Not one of theſe epiſtles contains in it that neceſ- “ ſary internal teſtimony of the divine authority of “ the writer, the ſpirit of prophecy; whiſt St. Paul’s “ Epiſtles

“Epistles to the Corinthians, Thessalonians, Galatians, and Timothy, have the historic testimony in their favour strongly corroborated by that and every other internal evidence of authenticity.”

Mr. Evanfon should say what, in his idea, constitutes a *canonical book* of the New Testament. In my opinion it is nothing more than a book written by an apostle, or other person of their age, well acquainted with the circumstances of the promulgation of Christianity, and therefore qualified to transmit an account of it to posterity, and also of so much importance as to deserve the attention of all Christians. Indeed, whatever such persons wrote concerning Christianity would necessarily be entitled to such attention. It is enough, therefore, for us to be satisfied with respect to the *genuineness* of the epistles ascribed to Paul or the other apostles; and the ancients had evidently no other object in their inquiries into this subject. Whether when they wrote they had any prophecy to communicate, depended both upon their having such prophecy, and a sufficient reason for communicating it at that time. And there are many proper occasions of writing, both to churches and particular persons, wholly independent of every thing of this nature. However, it happens that the epistle to the Romans does contain a prophecy, and a very important one, viz. that of the final conversion of the whole of the Jewish nation, which should have recommended it to the reception

tion of Mr. Evanfon. But he has feveral other objections to it, which I fhall not overlook.

1. "In the Epiftle to the Romans," p. 257, "the author writes indeed in the name of Paul; "but he writes to a Chriftian Church already fift-
"ing at Rome and celebrated for its faith in
"Chrift *throughout the whole world*, before he him-
"felf had been there." He fays that when Paul arrived at Rome he found no Chriftian church there, "as indeed," he fays, p. 258, "it is not at
"all probable there fhould have been. Who then," fays he, p. 258, "was that other Apoftle to the
"Gentiles, who fo far preceded St. Paul, as already
"to have reached Rome, without preaching the
"Gospel to the inhabitants of the intervening coun-
"tries of Afia Minor and Greece, and to have
"founded a church there early enough for its being
"*fpoken of throughout the whole world*, when St. Paul,
"in the execution of the commiffion miraculoufly
"given to him by Chrift himfelf, had advanced no
"farther than Macedonia and Greece?"

He fays, p. 259, moreover, that "from the laft
"chapter of the Acts it appears incontestably that
"they were not Chriftians but Jews who met Paul
"at Appii Forum; that his firft ftep, when he ar-
"rived at Rome, was to call together the Jews
"refident there and exculpate himfelf for having
"appealed to the Emperor; that thofe Jews, far
"from knowing the Gospel to have been already
"preached and received at Rome, declared them-
"felves

“selves totally ignorant concerning it, except that
“it was every where spoken against, and were de-
“sirous to be informed of its doctrines by him.”

In all this argument Mr. Evanfon takes for granted a thing which is far from appearing to be fact, viz. that no other than apostles could plant Christian churches. But were not the Samaritans, and also the Eunuch of Ethiopia, converted by Philip? And did not Barnabas and Mark go upon a progress to preach the gospel independently of Paul and Silas? What could be necessary to make converts to Christianity but a credible account of the doctrines and miracles of Christ, though the imparting the gift of the holy Spirit was useful to confirm such converts? And can Mr. Evanfon think it at all probable, that when the metropolis of the empire was constantly visited by persons from all parts of the known world, no Christians should have any occasion to go thither, or that they would be silent on a subject that interested themselves and others so much as the new religion, which they had just embraced, did? Is it at all credible, then, that there should be no Christian church at Rome before the year 62, when Paul was sent thither?

Besides, whatever Mr. Evanfon may fancy to the contrary, it is evident that they were *Christians* who met Paul at Puteoli and Appii Forum. For they are stiled *brethren*, a well known appellation of Christians, and he received from them that consolation which no other persons could have given him in
his

his circumstances. Acts xxviii. 13. *And we came the next day to Puteoli; where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days, and so we went towards Rome. And from thence when the brethren heard of us they met us as far as Appii Forum, and the Three Taverns, whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.* It is very extraordinary that Mr. Evanfon should imagine that those *brethren* were any other than *Christian brethren*. That Paul should desire to have a conference with the Jews of Rome was very natural. As he had been sent to Rome on an accusation of the chiefs of the nation, he would wish to have his case understood by those of his countrymen who were at Rome. These Jews were unacquainted with Christianity, and Paul took that opportunity of explaining it to them; but it by no means follows from this, that there were no Christians then at Rome, and a church, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles.

From very early times the epistles of Paul were publicly read in Christian churches, and among others in those very churches to which they were addressed, where it could not but have been known whether such epistles had been written to them or not. It is hardly possible to imagine any circumstance that would so effectually preclude all possibility of any imposition of the kind. And yet Mr. Evanfon seems never to have attended to it. The canon of the New Testament may be said to have been completed long before the memory of such epistles

epistles having been received, or not, could be lost. If Paul, for instance, wrote so large an epistle as that which now bears that title, to the church of Rome, whatever became of that particular copy, yet, as it had been read to the whole church at the time that it was received, it could never have been forgotten that he *had* written such an epistle. And if any epistle had at any time afterwards been brought to that church, and respect been claimed for it as written by the apostle, it would have been rejected with indignation; and the knowledge of this fact would have caused it to be rejected in all other Christian churches. The same may be said of the epistles addressed to other churches.

2. Mr. Evanfon objects to the authenticity of this epistle because when Paul wrote it he signified his intention of going by way of Rome into Spain. "Now" says he, p. 257, "whoever has read, with proper attention, the history of St. Paul's travels written by his friend and fellow-traveller Silas or Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, must be convinced, that St. Paul never had the least idea of travelling into Spain." But does the writer of that book mention every thing that Paul *intended* to do, when it is evident that he relates only a small part of what he actually *did*?

3. So differently do the same things strike different persons, that the salutations at the end of the epistle to the Romans, which are so like those with which the other epistles of Paul terminate, that they furnish

furnish one of the clearest proofs of their genuineness, are with Mr. Evanfon marks of forgery. "I cannot forbear" he says, p. 260, "remarking farther the inconsistency of this writer, which indeed must generally be discernible in all falsifiers, in making St. Paul personally acquainted with so long a list of members of the church of Rome, where he had never been, amongst whom we find Aquila and Priscilla, and even his own mother, to whom he sends his salutation, in the last chapter, v. 13. Of the two first St. Luke tells us that, about, or rather before, the pretended date of this Epistle, they had left Rome, being Jews, in obedience to an edict of Claudius. And if there is any reason to believe that St. Paul's mother was then living, is it credible, that an old woman of Tarsus in Cilicia, whose son was so wonderfully appointed to preach the gospel, and who was occupied in that commission in Asia and Greece, should leave her native country and such a son, and ramble after other preachers of the gospel, at so advanced an age, to the far distant metropolis of Italy?"

Mr. Evanfon, however, will find that when this epistle was written, Claudius, by whose edict the Jews had been banished from Rome, was dead, and therefore many of those who had left the place would take the opportunity of returning. It is evident from the clearest circumstances that the Epistle to the Romans was written in the beginning of the year

58, which was the fifth of Nero. As to Paul's mother, it was probably some aged matron to whom he was under particular obligation, and to whom he might, on this account, give such an endearing appellation. Or if it was his natural mother, improbable as, no doubt, it was, it was not absolutely impossible, but that she might be at Rome.

4. "But in the eleventh chapter," Mr. Evan-son says, p. 260, "the author clearly betrays him-
 "self to be, not St. Paul, but some person who
 "lived and wrote some time after the destruction
 "of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews;
 "for to these events alone, can the following sen-
 "tences refer. Verse 12, If the fall of them (the
 "Jews) be the riches of the world, and the dimi-
 "nishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how
 "much more their fulness? Again, v. 15, If the
 "casting away of them be the reconciling of the
 "world, what shall the receiving of them be?
 "Again, v. 21 and 22, If God spared not the na-
 "tural branches, take heed lest he also spare not
 "thee. Behold the goodness and severity of God:
 "on them which fell severity; but towards thee
 "goodness, if thou continue in goodness; other-
 "wise thou also *shalt be cut off*," &c.

This objection goes upon the principle that Paul could have no idea of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the subsequent dispersion of the Jews, but after the events. But if this was the case, as the same rule must apply to all other writers as well as Paul,

Luke

Luke not excepted, *his* Gospel must have been written after those events. But had Paul never heard of our Saviour's prophecies, and if so, might he not allude to the events predicted by him? Besides, he himself saw so much of the incredulity of the Jewish nation, that he might be well satisfied that the time of their general conversion was at a great distance, and their *casting away* means nothing more than their general unbelief.

If the writer of this Epistle could not allude to any events but such as he was witness to himself, how could he allude, as he evidently does, to the general conversion of the Jews, and the effect it would have upon the Gentiles, which has not taken place even yet? This is certainly a prophecy, and therefore might have been expected to recommend this epistle to Mr. Evanfon. Or, if we consider it as nothing more than a probable conjecture, might he not suppose the allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem to be a conjecture too, and therefore no proof of the epistle having been written after the event?

I am, &c.

L E T T E R X.

*Of Mr. Evanſon's Objection to ſome other Epiſtles in
the New Teſtament.*

DEAR SIR,

ONE Letter more relating to Mr. Evanſon's objections to ſome other epiſtles in our canon of the New Teſtament ſhall cloſe all that I have to obſerve of this kind.

1. "The Epiſtle to the Ephesians," he ſays, p. 261, "is alſo written in the name of St. Paul, "but under a ſuppoſition that a Chriſtian church "was ſettled at Ephesus, before Paul himſelf preach- "ed the Goſpel there; for c. i. v. 15 and 16, the "writer makes him ſay, Wherefore I alſo after I "heard of your faith in the Lord Jeſus and love unto "all the Saints, ceaſe not to give thanks for you, "&c. and c. iii. v. 1, &c. for this cauſe, I Paul, "the Priſoner of Jeſus Chriſt, for you Gentiles, if "ye have heard of the diſpenſation of the grace of "God which is given to me to you-ward: how "that by revelation he made known unto me the "myſtery (as I wrote afore in few words;) whereby "when ye read ye may underſtand my knowledge "in the myſtery of Chriſt. This ſuppoſition, "however,

“ however, cannot possibly be allowed by any one
“ who credits the history of the Acts of the Apostles;
“ tles; for in that we are expressly told, c. 18 and
“ 19, that St. Paul himself preached the gospel at
“ Ephesus, first, in the synagogue of the Jews at
“ two different times, and afterwards in the school
“ of Tyrannus, for the space of two years; and to
“ read over his valedictory discourse to the elders of
“ the church of Ephesus, at Miletus, recorded
“ Acts 20, is amply sufficient to convince every
“ impartial mind, that St. Paul could never have
“ written to the Ephesians in the above quoted
“ language of this Epistle. Some critics indeed,
“ without the least proof, suggest that this Epistle
“ was originally inscribed to the church of Laodicea,
“ and not of Ephesus; but if there was really any
“ satisfactory evidence, that, notwithstanding the
“ great dissimilarity of the names, the transcribers
“ of all the existing copies had conspired to make
“ so extraordinary a change, still the difficulty
“ would not be removed; because, according to
“ the Acts, St. Paul was the first preacher of the
“ Gospel at Laodicea also, and every other part of
“ Asia Minor.”

Now it by no means appears from the Acts of the Apostles, that Paul could be said to have planted the Christian church at Ephesus, though he greatly promoted the Christian cause in that city. Paul visited Ephesus for the first time on his way from Corinth to Jerusalem, whither he was

making all the haste that he could. He therefore only preached in the Jewish synagogue, and immediately left the place. It is not said either that he was the first Christian who had preached there, or that he then made any converts, Acts xviii. 18—21.

After this we find Apollos preaching at Ephesus, where he was farther instructed by Aquila and Priscilla, v. 24—28. When, after this, Paul came to reside at Ephesus, he found some persons, twelve men in all, who were only acquainted with the baptism of John; but it is not said that these were the only disciples in the place. If so, the preaching of Apollos had produced no effect, the contrary of which is strongly intimated. After this Paul continued two years in this city. How then is it any just objection to the genuineness of this epistle to the Ephesians, which has the unanimous testimony of all antiquity, confirmed by many internal marks, that Paul should mention his *hearing of their faith*?

Besides, considering how long Paul had been absent from Ephesus, his saying that he had *heard of their faith* was by no means unnatural, though he himself had been the first to preach among them; since in the mean time they might have swerved from the faith, or at least their zeal might have abated.

Though the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp are, I believe, greatly interpolated, and especially the former, yet there is evidence that they did write such epistles as those that are ascribed to them, and, therefore,

therefore, where there was no apparent reason for falsifying, I think they afford some arguments with respect to this subject, as well as others. Now Ignatius appears to have read the Epistle to the Ephesians, and Polycarp that to the Philippians, both of which are objected to by Mr. Evanfon.

2. "The same insuperable objection," says Mr. Evanfon, p. 263, "lies against the Epistle to the Colossians, which is manifestly fabricated by the same opificer who composed that to the Ephesians. In chap. i. v. 4—9, the author makes St. Paul say, that it was Epaphras, who first preached the gospel to the Colossians; and that it was from him he had *heard of* their faith and love in Christ Jesus. And c. ii. v. 1. he makes him expressly declare, that neither they nor the Laodiceans *had seen his face in the flesh*. Yet Colosse and Laodicea were both cities of Phrygia, where St. Luke assures us, St. Paul, accompanied by himself, repeatedly preached the gospel to every city *in order*."

But from its being said that Paul went over the cities of this district *in order*, it cannot be inferred that he missed none of them, or that he founded Christian churches in any of them. Such great cities as Ephesus, Antioch, and Alexandria, (which last place we do not know to have ever been visited by any apostle) were, like Rome, places of such general resort, that it cannot be supposed that they could be long without Christians; and the same

might have been the case of Colosse, and other cities.

3. Mr. Evanston's objections to the genuineness of the Epistle to the Philippians, and also to that to Titus, he owns are not so strong as those against the preceding epistles, though, "in his estimation, they render them both highly apocryphal," p. 263. His first objection is that the writer first mentions *saints*, or Christians in general, and then the *bishops* and *deacons*, which he says "is not to be found in any epistolary address of St. Paul, and which, if it be not an interpolation, favours strongly of a much later age than that of the apostle." If, however, there were regular officers in Christian churches, as we know there were, in the time of the apostles, how could it be unlikely that Paul should mention them separately, after speaking of the Christians in general?

4. Mr. Evanston also thinks that there could not have been, as is intimated in this epistle, "any Christians in the court of Nero," p. 264, "a fact in the highest degree improbable, and far from being confirmed by Luke or any Roman historian; and that many disciples of the Gospel, who, to be many, must have been converted before St. Paul's arrival at Rome, which St. Luke's history makes quite incredible, emboldened by his success, preached the gospel there at the same time that he did, some of them, good Christians! only
"enviously

“ enviously for contention and strife’s sake, in hopes
“ to vex and tease him; all which seems irrecon-
“ cileable to the account given us in the last chapter
“ of the Acts.”

Since, however, some persons of rank were converted in Judea, and in other places, where is the peculiar improbability of some such converts being made at Rome? Ecclesiastical history makes this more than probable with respect to times a little posterior to these. But as this circumstance would be favourable to the existence of a Christian church at Rome before the arrival of Paul there, which would give some probability to the genuineness of the Epistle to the Romans, Mr. Evanfon cannot admit it.

5. Mr. Evanfon thinks that Paul could not use such language as, *Beware of dogs, beware of the concision*. He also thinks that he could not have had any *yoke-fellow*, as is mentioned ch. iv. 3; or speak of the *Lord being at hand*, v. 5; and that, no accusation being sent to Rome by the Jews against Paul, he could not have been under *affliction* there. But surely it cannot be necessary to reply to such trifling objections as these.

6. His objections to the Epistle to Titus are still more manifestly weak, “ The very introductory address,” he says, p. 267, “ excites in my mind a strong suspicion that it was not written by St. Paul; for he calls himself, what he never does in any other Epistle, *a servant of God*; though to the Galatians, c. iv. v. 6 and 7, he says, “ be-
“ cause

“ cause ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of
 “ his son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father,
 “ wherefore thou art no more a *servant* but a son,
 “ &c.” He adds also, “ an Apostle of Jesus Christ”
 “ (not *by the will of God*, as he usually expresses it,
 “ but) *according to the faith of God’s elect and the ac-*
 “ *knowledging of the truth;*” all which, in St. Paul’s
 “ mouth, is quite a new kind of language.” He is
 next offended at a quotation from a Greek poet,
 and this poet being called a prophet, and at the writer
 including himself in saying that *we ourselves were*
sometimes foolish, &c.

7. To the Epistle to Philemon, which contains as
 many marks of genuineness as any of the epistles of
 Cicero, he objects to the mention of his *fellow pri-*
soner, “ though,” he says, p. 269, “ we learn from
 “ the Acts that he himself was the only Christian pri-
 “ soner sent thither by Festus, and that he was per-
 “ mitted to dwell by himself, with a soldier that kept
 “ him.”

I fear I have tired your patience by many unne-
 cessary replies to objections to the other epistles,
 and therefore I leave these, as I am confident I very
 safely may, without any answers at all. As to the
 epistle to the Hebrews, the authenticity of which,
 though not its antiquity, was objected to in very
 early times, I have little doubt of its having been
 written by Paul, though his name is not annexed to
 it, and the style is different from that of his other
 epistles. I likewise pass over Mr. Evanfon’s ob-
 jections

jections to the Epistle of James, those of Peter, and of John.

I cannot conclude these remarks without observing, that had Mr. Evanſon read that truly maſterly piece of criticiſm, the *Horæ Paulinæ* of Mr. Paley, he would have ſaved himſelf the trouble of writing his treatiſe, and me that of anſwering it. The epiſtles that he objects to contain more, and more various, internal marks of genuinenefs than perhaps any other ancient writings whatever. And the genuinenefs of Paul's epiſtles furniſhes as ſtrong a proof of the truth of Chriſtianity, as that of Cicero's does of the general facts in the Roman hiſtory of his times. The only thing that is wanting is a due attention to the circumſtances,

I am, &c.

LETTER

L E T T E R X I I .

Of the arbitrary proceeding of Mr. Evanfon in making the gospel of Luke his standard, by which to examine the other Gospels.

DEAR SIR,

HAVING replied, as far as I have thought necessary, to all the objections that Mr. Evanfon has made to the authenticity of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, and to that of several of the epistles universally deemed canonical, I am tempted to give you one letter more, to shew you how easy it is to make such objections; and with how little reason Mr. Evanfon has fixed upon the Gospel of Luke as his standard, by which to try all the others.

Had Mr. Evanfon been previously disposed to object to the Gospel of Luke, as he was with respect to those of Matthew, Mark, and John, he would, I doubt not, have found as little difficulty in the business; and his ingenuity would have exhibited the passages he objected to in a light equally ridiculous. This I shall not attempt to do for him. I should feel an invincible reluctance to it. But I shall just mention a few circumstances of the kind, to shew that there is no real difference in the several evangelists

evangelists in this respect. They are equally entitled to our highest respect, though, from their peculiar circumstances, equally open to superficial and unreasonable cavils.

The quantity of interpolation that Mr. Evanfon supposes in the Gospel of Luke makes it a little better than a spurious work. He intimates a suspicion, that besides the two first chapters of introduction, the story of the demon going into the swine *, the circumstance

* Mr. Evanfon thinks the story of the demon's going into the herd of swine an interpolation in the Gospel of Luke, chiefly because, if it be admitted to be genuine, Jesus will be found on the east side of the sea of Galilee, p. 27, "without the slightest insinuation of having crossed the lake. If," says he, p. 28, "this very exceptionable miracle be an interpolation, and not part of the original writing of St. Luke, the narrative proceeds consistently and regularly: but if it be taken as authentic, there is such a geographical confusion and disorder in this part of the history, as occurs nowhere else in this author's works; and such as can neither be allowed nor indeed supposed in an historian, who writing upon a subject of the greatest importance, sets out with professing to write accurately and *in order*."

Now all this supposed confusion arises from nothing more than the evangelist omitting to say in what manner Jesus and his disciples came to that desert place. Had he said *by sea*, there would have been no room for the objection, and surely a mere omission implies no contradiction. It is remarkable that all the other evangelists particularly mention the passage to this desert place *by sea*, so that if Mr. Evanfon, without considering their writings as authentic, had only read them as ancient books which might occasionally supply a commentary on the Gospel
of

stance of Jesus promising the thief on the cross to be with him in paradise that night, and the account of the transfiguration, that of the genealogy of Jesus, of the temptation, and of his baptism, are all interpolations. "It well deserves our notice," he says, note, p. 55, "that if we pass from the account of John's imprisonment by Herod, c. iii. 20, to c. iv. 14, and read, *Then came Jesus*, instead of, *and Jesus returned*, the histories both of John and Jesus proceed regularly and in order; and the ministry of the Messiah, as is most probable, commenced upon the cessation of the Baptist's ministry by his being *shut up in prison*. But if the account of our Lord's being baptized by John is genuine, Herod's imprisoning the latter is related very much out of its proper order, and St. Luke has given us no date for the commencement of our Lord's ministry, though he has been so

of Luke, he would have had his great difficulty removed. Matthew says, xiv. 13, *When Jesus heard of it*, viz. the death of John the Baptist, *he departed thence by ship into a desert place privately*. Mark says, vi. 32, *And they departed into a desert place by ship privately*. John vi. 1, *After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias*. But Luke says the same in effect. For he says, ix. 10, *And he took them and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city of Bethsaida*; which being on the east side of the lake, clearly implies that they crossed the sea. How natural is it to remark that this variety in expressing the same thing proves that all these writers wrote from their own knowledge, without any communication with each other; and that John, though he might have seen the other Gospels, did not copy them?

"particularly

“ particularly exact in fixing the date of the com-
“ mencement of John’s preaching. Besides John
“ was sent only to prepare the people for the recep-
“ tion of the Messiah and his new covenant, by
“ preaching to them *the baptism of repentance for the*
“ *remission of sins*; and (to say nothing of *the bodily*
“ *shape like a dove*, which savours strongly of the su-
“ perstition of the second century) with what pro-
“ priety could he, *who knew no sin*, receive such a
“ baptism? or the destined Messiah attend the
“ preaching of his own precursor to be prepared by
“ him for the coming of himself? And what pro-
“ bability is there, that our Lord would have studi-
“ ously avoided calling himself *the Son of God* dur-
“ ing his whole ministry, and forbidden his disci-
“ ples before his death to announce him as such to
“ the Jews, if God himself had miraculously declar-
“ ed him to be so by a voice from heaven, in the
“ audience of so great a multitude? Or how could
“ John, after such an attestation, have ever enter-
“ tained a doubt whether Jesus was the expected
“ Messiah?” Rather than suppose so many inter-
polations, which other persons are at liberty to ex-
tend to other articles, as much as Mr. Evanston was
to extend it to these, it would have been more in his
manner to have treated this Gospel as he has done
the other three, and have considered them all as
equally fabrications of the second century. For so
much interpolation makes it a work as little to be
depended upon, and as unsafe to quote.

Had

Had Mr. Evanfon taken it for granted that Luke wrote the two first chapters of his Gospel, as, with much less reason, he has done, that the writer of Matthew's Gospel did the two first of *his*, he would have found many more improbabilities in them, especially those that I have noted in what I have written on the subject of the miraculous conception. He would, with his sarcastic turn, have treated with unbounded contempt the whole story of the conception and birth of John the Baptist, the speech of the angel Gabriel, the exclamation of Elizabeth on the visit of Mary, the prophecy of Zacharias, as well as those of Simeon and Anna, the story of the shepherds, and the account of the taxing by Cyrenius, which is clearly inconsistent with the history of Josephus, &c. &c. &c.

If Mr. Evanfon had pitched upon the Gospel of Matthew as his standard, he would have condemned the genealogy of Jesus in Luke, as inconsistent with that of the other evangelist. He might have said that the history of the call of Levi, Luke v. 27, must have arisen from some mistake, as the writer has not informed his reader, either there, or in his enumeration of the twelve apostles afterwards, that he was the same person with Matthew. The story of Jairus he would have said is evidently misplaced, and the whole order of events disarranged. But what is of much more consequence, and betrays the want of information in a writer who pretends to the greatest circumspection, is his account of the resurrection

rection of Jesus, which is essentially different not only from that of the other evangelists, but from that of Paul, in his epistle to the Corinthians. For according to this Gospel Jesus saw none but the eleven apostles, and the two disciples who went to Emmaus, and after shewing himself to them, immediately led them to the place of his ascension, without a possibility of his being seen by the *five hundred brethren* that Paul mentions, to say nothing of the separate appearances to Cephas and James.

Mr. Evanfon objects to the Gospel of Matthew for representing Jesus as sentencing the wicked to *everlasting punishment*. But according to that of Luke John the Baptist dooms the unbelieving Jews to *unquenchable fire*, ch. iii. ver. 17; and in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Mr. Evanfon would have found too much countenance for the unscriptural doctrine of an intermediate state.

With the same turn of mind with which Mr. Evanfon censures many things in the Gospel of Matthew, he would have smiled at Luke's account of the descent of the Holy Spirit in the *shape* of a dove, whereas, according to the other evangelists, the *descent* only resembled that of a dove. The history of the temptation might have been made more improbable than that of the transfiguration, and the account of the cure of the demoniac who addressed Jesus as *the Son of God* (Luke iv. 34,) he would have said, was not less improbable than that of the man who was possessed by a legion of demons.

M

With

With respect to our Saviour, there are many things ascribed to him in Luke, which Mr. Evan-son might have thought as unlikely to come from him as any that, on the same account, he objects to in the Gospel of Matthew. He thinks it impossible that Jesus should have given to the apostles the power of *forgiving sins*; but it is what, according to Luke, is assumed by Jesus himself, ch. v. ver. 20. He doth not think that Paul would have used such abusive language as is ascribed to him in the epistle to the Philippians, *beware of dogs, &c.* But according to Luke Jesus calls Herod *a fox*, ch. xiii. ver. 32; he insists upon his followers *hating their fathers and mothers, &c. &c.* xiv. 2; he commends the unjust steward, xvi. 8; he compares God to an unjust judge, who was teased into an act of justice, ch. 18; he condemns a well disposed young man, who had kept all the commands of God, because he would not sell all that he had and follow him, xviii. 22; and he says there was *more joy in heaven over one sinner that repented, than over ninety and nine just persons that needed no repentance*, xv. 7.

I need not tell you, who have read Mr. Evan-son, and justly admire his ingenuity, what turn he would have given to these things, and others of the same nature, in order to discredit the Gospel which contains them. And if I were to look into those epistles which he allows to be genuine, it would be no less easy to point out things as objectionable in *them*, as in the rest. But, in fact, I should only be repeating the
stale

stale remarks, and low jests, of unbelievers, which it would be easy to collect, and more easy to answer.

In so different a light did the learned Michaelis and Mr. Evanston see the same things, that the former, speaking of the Gospel of Luke, says (*Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 54) "Perhaps I am not mistaken when I assert that as many doubts, from apparent contradictions with antient writers, may be raised against St. Luke alone, as against all the other apostles and evangelists put together." But how light he made of these objections, may be seen by his comparing them to the objections that might be made to the authenticity of the *Commentaries of Julius Cæsar*, which, that you may compare them with those of Mr. Evanston against that of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, I shall quote at full length, from his *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. i. p. 25.

"It is generally thought sufficient to shew the writings of a classic author to be genuine, if some one among the ancients has merely spoken of the work, as Cicero, Hirtius, and Suetonius have done of Cæsar's descriptions of his own campaigns, without quoting passages from the book itself. But it may be objected, 'It is possible, indeed, that Cæsar may have written such a treatise, but how can we be certain, that the Commentaries which we ascribe to him as their author, were the same which Cicero, Hirtius, and Suetonius read? Is it credible that Cæsar was the author of an history in which so

“ frequent remarks are interspersed to the disparage-
 “ ment of the Germans, remarks which excite even
 “ a suspicion of their timidity, when it is said in the
 “ very beginning of the work, that the Gauls them-
 “ selves acknowledged the Germans to be their supe-
 “ riors in bravery? Can suspicions like these proceed
 “ from a general who was in a great measure indebted
 “ to his German auxiliaries for the victory of Pharsa-
 “ lia, a circumstance again omitted to be mentioned in
 “ the *Bellum Civile*? Are these the Commentaries so
 “ commended by Cicero, and Hirtius, and to which
 “ the latter applied the observation: *præcepta, non*
 “ *præbita facultas scriptoribus videtur*? Could these
 “ Commentaries have existed in the days of Florus,
 “ who likewise describes the battle of Pharsalia, and
 “ estimates the number in both armies at 300,000,
 “ besides auxiliaries, when the number given in the
 “ Commentaries is so considerably inferior? Could
 “ Florus have been better acquainted with the state
 “ of the army than Cæsar, and would he have neg-
 “ lected to derive his intelligence from the best possi-
 “ ble accounts, had such accounts at that time ex-
 “ isted?

“ Objections like these to the authenticity of Cæsar
 “ would be answered by every critic in classical lite-
 “ rature, not with a serious reply, but with a smile of
 “ contempt. Yet, weak and trivial as these argu-
 “ ments may appear, they are stronger than such as
 “ can with justice be applied to the writings of the
 “ New Testament, which are not only mentioned by
 “ the

“ the earliest Fathers, as being written by those
“ Evangelists and Apostles, to whom we ascribe
“ them, but quoted and explained at such consider-
“ able length, as leaves no possibility of a doubt that
“ the writings to which they allude, are the very
“ same with those, which have been transmitted to
“ us under that title.”

I think I cannot conclude these Letters better than
with this valuable extract, and therefore, submitting
all that I have advanced to your attentive con-
sideration,

I remain, Dear Sir,

Yours, sincerely,

J. PRIESTLEY.

Clapton, Aug. 1793.

APPENDIX.

1. *Remarks on some Passages in Mr. Evanfon's Letter to the Bishop of Worcester.*

SINCE the preceding sheets were printed, I have once more perused Mr. Evanfon's *Letter to the Bishop of Worcester*, of which, from having read it at its first publication only, I had but an imperfect recollection. I only remembered that I was then much pleased with the general object of the work, though offended at the manner in which the author treated some of the books of the New Testament, and that I was dissatisfied with his idea of the nature of *historical evidence*, which led him to lay such an undue stress on that of *prophecy*.

Speaking of miracles, he says, p. 9, "The full force of this kind of preternatural evidence operates only on the eye-witnesses of the miraculous facts. To succeeding generations its weight is continually decreasing, in proportion to the length of time elapsed from the wonder working period." This, however, is by no means agreeable to reason, or experience. Our belief of facts of which we ourselves were not witnesses, depends upon our conviction that other persons, on whose judgment and integrity we could depend, *were* witnesses of them;

and this persuasion once established no more admits of any change than a persuasion of any other kind. It is now more than two thousand years since the invasion of Greece by Xerxes; but can it be said that the evidence of this fact is sensibly lessened? No person will pretend to say that it is.

The same is the case with respect to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, with their passage through the Red Sea, and the river Jordan; for the miraculous nature of the facts makes no difference in the case, if the original evidence be proportionably strong, so that if the facts were credible in the first instance, they will always remain so; and our latest posterity will have the same reason to be satisfied with respect to them that we now have. If even all the histories, of which we are now in possession should be destroyed, there will always be sufficient evidence that we, their ancestors, were in possession of them, and that will satisfy them.

That, in the view of divine Providence, miracles are sufficient to convince not only those who are themselves witnesses of them, but all succeeding generations, is evident from what the Divine Being said to Moses previous to the grand exhibition from Mount Sinai, Exod. xix. 9. *And the Lord said unto Moses, Lo I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak unto thee, and believe thee for ever.* And this actually proved to be abundantly sufficient to convince, not that generation only, but every succeeding generation of Jews to this day;
nor

nor is there the least prospect of their faith failing in any length of time.

That one part of *the testimony of Jesus*, as we read Rev. xix. 10, is *the spirit of prophecy*, is what no Christian will deny; but it is by no means exclusively so. And it is remarkable that when Jesus himself appeals to three modes of proving his divine mission, in the fifth chapter of John, he says nothing of *prophecy*. What he appeals to are the voice from heaven at his baptism, the testimony of John, and the miracles that his Father enabled him to do. Though among *these* the *prophecies* he was enabled to deliver, were, no doubt, included, there is no separate mention of them, as Mr. Evanfon, from the stress that he lays upon this circumstance, would, I imagine, have expected.

In order to expose the Gospel of Matthew, Mr. Evanfon says, p. 92, that according to it, the women who went to see the sepulchre of Jesus, were there at the same time with the soldiers, and consequently must have been present during the earthquake, and at the resurrection; because in speaking to them, and saying, *Fear ye not*, the writer uses the personal pronoun, *υμεις*, *ye*, and not merely the second person plural of the verb. This, he says, must have been by way of *contrast* to the fear of the soldiers, whom they must therefore have seen terrified and flying. But there are several instances in which the pronoun *υμεις*, *ye*, is used without any particular emphasis, or contrast: as when our Saviour says, Matt. v. 48, *Be ye perfect*
even

even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect. Matt. xiii. 18, *Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.* Where is the contrast here? However, as the women might perceive that the guards were fled (seeing perhaps some marks of their flight) and might suppose it was from some cause of fear, the angel might allude to *that*, in bidding *them* not to fear. It is sufficiently evident that, according to this evangelist, the women did not see Jesus in the act of rising, and therefore could not have been present at the earthquake, or the flight of the soldiers. For the angel says to them, v. 28, *I know that ye seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen. Come and see the place where the Lord lay:* so that the resurrection was evidently over before they came.

In this Letter Mr. Evanfon's preference of the Gospel of Luke may be easily perceived, and also his rejection of that of Matthew; but he seems at that time to have retained his respect for that of John, as of equal authority with other canonical books of the New Testament. For, speaking of what is there said of the conversation of our Lord with Nicodemus, he says, p. 90, "I have frequently considered this passage with that attention wherewith it is the duty of every public teacher, and indeed of every Christian, to consider those parts of scripture especially upon which any essential doctrines of our religion are founded."

2. *Of the Date of Luke's Gospel.*

Some have thought that Paul refers to a written Gospel in his epistles to the Corinthians, and to Timothy, that this Gospel was that of Luke, and that if Matthew or Mark had seen this Gospel they would not have written any. Consequently the works that bear their names are spurious compositions.

The passages in which Paul is supposed to allude to a written gospel are the following. 1 Cor. ix. 9. *It is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn.* V. 14. *Even so hath the Lord ordained that they who preach the gospel should live of the Gospel.* Tim. v. 18. *For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn; and the labourer is worthy of his reward.* Now I think it is evident that the writer quotes the passage from Moses only as something *written*, and *scripture*, and not the saying of our Lord corresponding to it.

If the Gospel of Luke had preceded any other gospel so long as this hypothesis requires, viz. eight or nine years, it would have acquired so much reputation, that some preference would have been given to it in Christian tradition; no similar work, not well known to be written by an apostle, or some person equally qualified, could ever have been ranked with it; and it could never have been supposed by any of the ancients that the Gospel of Matthew was

prior to it. Nor is it possible to account for the universal opinion that the Gospel of Matthew was written by the apostle, and that of Mark by the companion of Peter, on the supposition of their being spurious compositions, of no real authority. The difficulty of imposing upon the whole Christian world such books as these, interested as every individual Christian was in the question, and this either while the supposed authors were living, or soon after their death, can never have been attended to by those who entertain such an opinion; and to effect such an imposition so completely, in those peculiar circumstances, as to leave no trace of the truth, far exceeds the powers of man; besides that it is not possible to imagine any motive for such an imposture. I think it very probable that Luke wrote both his treatises during the two last years of Paul's imprisonment at Rome, and that this supposition will remove every difficulty.

3. *Of the identity of Luke and Silas.*

A learned and ingenious friend of mine thinks that Luke and Silas were the same person, because it appears from Acts xvi. 19, 25, 29, that Paul and Silas only were imprisoned at Philippi; so that, if Timothy accompanied them to that city, he was not with them when the Pythonefs followed them; and if so, when it is said, v. 17, *the same followed Paul and us*, Silas must be intended, and consequently he

he must be the author of the book. It is very remarkable, he adds, that Mill mentions four MSS. as having in this place *Silas* instead of *us*.

But though Paul might have twenty persons in his company when he was apprehended, it would not follow that they were *all* taken into custody. The magistrates might very well content themselves with taking the most zealous preachers. When Peter and John were imprisoned at Jerusalem, and when James was put to death there, the rest of the apostles, though we cannot suppose that they had been idle, or were unknown, were not molested; and though Paul had companions when he went into the temple at his last visit to Jerusalem, they were not seized along with him.

Timothy appears to have been in Paul's company at Beræa, on the same progress, chap. xvii. 4; so that there is no reason to suppose that he left him either at Philippi or Thessalonica; and if Timothy was with him, Luke might be there too. As *Paul and Silas* occur in several places, and *Paul and us* in others, it is not at all extraordinary that, in copying the book, the one should sometimes, by mistake, be written for the other.

THE END.

ERRATA ET CORRIGENDA.

N. B. (*b*) Signifies from the bottom of the page.

P. 8. l. 2. for *thousand*, read *thousands*.

30. l. 5. (*b*) read, *seems to be alluded to*.

131. l. 7. for *of*, read *to*.

137. l. 15, 16. read *the preparation for that sabbath*.

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